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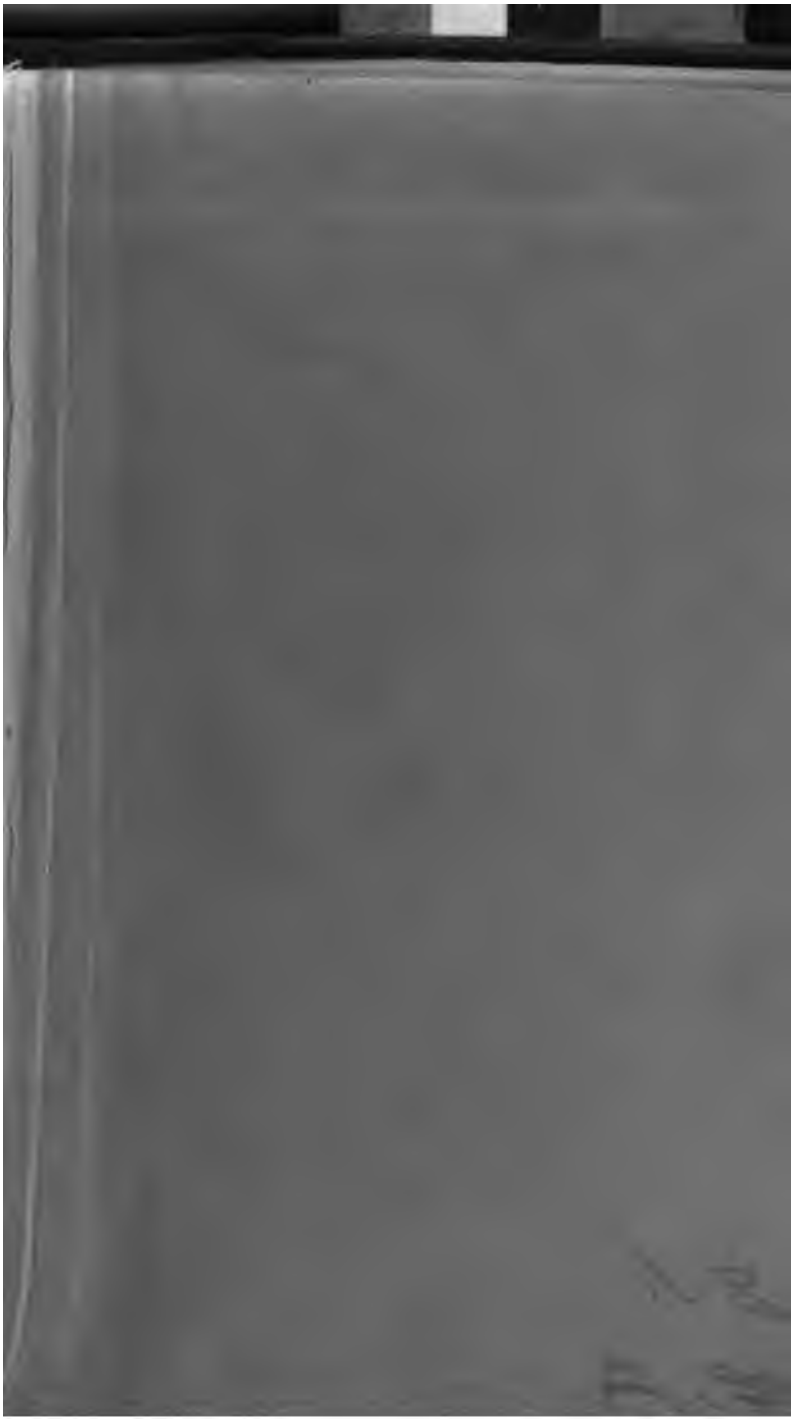
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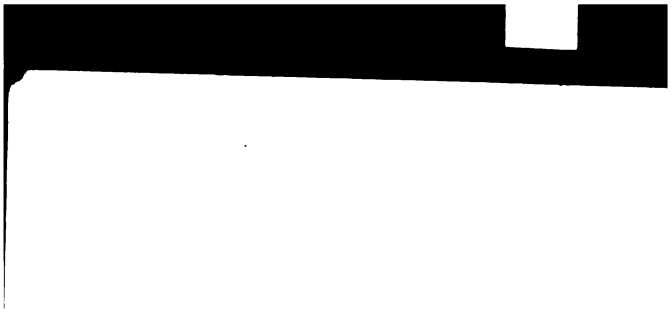
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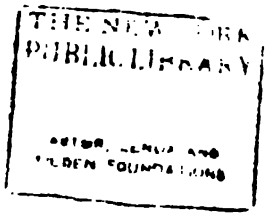
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"The wireless continued to spell F. L."

American Pep

A Tale of America's Efficiency

BY

A. STONE

AUTHOR OF "DRUMHEAD EQUITY"

Illustrated by

FRANK KEANE



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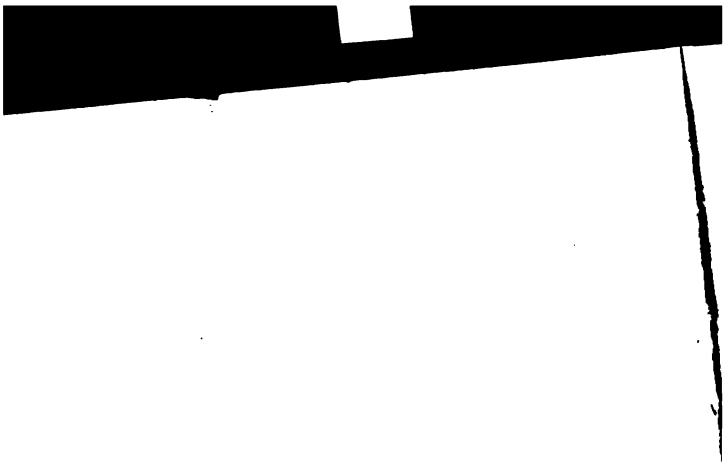
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1923

[redacted]

American Pep

By A. STONE



American Pep

Chapter One

SAVAGELY RAPID AND POWERFUL the Government Wireless Station at Washington began instantly on a message to the Malcom Powder Works.

"French Ship, carrying your explosive S. H., blew up in Halifax Harbor. Town totally destroyed. Ten thousand killed. Twenty thousand injured. Ruins in flames and furious blizzard raging. Deep snow and below zero. Hold carload shipment of S. H. until Marines arrive to guard the sea coast.
(Signed)."

Dorn, the operator, had answered the signal with trepidation; his soul-destroying premonition

was reliable. Every flash of the instrument was a stab. His knees knocked and his voice shook as he telephoned the message to Mr. Malcom.

Only a hundred cases destroyed Halifax! — and was it accident or design? Two thousand cases of it within pistol-shot! Dorn knew he was not the craven coward. But the disastrous holocaust unnerved him. The cause of the Allies and the Nation was at stake! This mountain town, so valuable to the Government, might meet the fate of Nova Scotia's biggest city at any moment, and it's time for every man to show — At that moment he saw Betty Fraser, his assistant, coming to work. He struggled for composure. She need not get the shock — not just yet, anyhow.

Through the smoke grimed windows of the ticket office at Malcom, Jack Dorn, the station agent, looked out across the track toward Bald Eagle Canyon. His long, thin legs upheld a taut, healthy body, but the grip of his curled fingers indicated at that moment a stress of high nervous tension.

He turned from the bay-window toward the girl operator who had just finished sending a message. Betty Fraser left the instrument and

came to Dorn's side. She, too, looked across the track in the direction of Bald Eagle Canyon.

"This place is getting on my nerves," Dorn exploded. "It's plain hell!"

The girl shivered. "Are you commencing to feel it too?" she said.

"Commencing to feel it! I always have felt it, from the first moment I ran old Number 1750 into that oozing, dripping inferno of the mountains. It's no place for you, either," he ended savagely.

"But I've lived here all my life," she reminded. "It has been only lately I have minded. Something more terrible seems in the air."

Malcom was a powder workers' town. Centuries before, Bruce Malcom, a Highland Scot, had roofed over part of Bald Eagle Canyon and had commenced to manufacture gunpowder there. He invented and made Stag Brand rifle powder stand for quality. The deep, narrow canyon was an ideal place for the gunpowder works and succeeding generations had continued to maintain the plant. Gradually the town of Malcom was built up and continued to grow within a half mile of the powder factory.

When the railroad finally elbowed Malcom

River to one side of Bald Eagle Canyon, and came up within a thousand feet of the gunpowder works it took time for the town to recover from the shock, but gradually they realized the added market facilities.

The Malcoms were proud of the fact that in every war for several generations they had furnished Stag Brand gunpowder to the government. Malcom IV shrewdly paid his men high wages but down there in the dark, dripping canyon nerves commenced to strain and snap. The granite, vibrationless factory had commenced to manufacture a new explosive for the government, a composition twelve times stronger than anything previously made. This explosive the men had named Sky High, and even their years of accustomed handling deadly ticklish products failed to lessen their terror of this powerful new menace to life.

"You're right," Dorn agreed, "something terrible is in the air. I'm not superstitious, but I've been feeling it all week."

The girl turned quickly to take a message from the wire. Dorn watched her straight, young body and the black splendor of her hair, delicate ear and straight nose as she bent over the instru-

ment. She had been his assistant only two months and he had not yet even commenced to fathom the mysteries of her womanhood. He was unused to women and she had been to him from the first both a puzzle and a delight. At no time had he been able to read back of the dark shaded screen of her eyes that protected the real woman.

She turned now to read aloud the telegram she just had taken. It was signed by the superintendent of the road and Dorn gave full attention.

"Agreeable with orders from constituted military authorities, I am passing Lieutenant Pettingill with a squad of ten marines to your station tomorrow on Number 22, at 4.30 P.M. Pettingill and squad will constitute an armed guard to seaboard for a carload of special product from the Malcom Powder Company, which is reported ready for loading. If you do not have a maximum forty ton car in perfect physical condition, advise us and one will be attached today to passenger train 72, as time is an important element. The car must be loaded and ready to attach to express freight 17, due to leave your station tomorrow at 7.30 P.M.

J. C. CONSTANCE."

"I've got a car," said Dorn. "We're lucky for once. There is a new B. R. & B."

"Shall I tell him?" asked Miss Fraser. "I still have his wire." Her slender fingers rested on the instrument in front of her.

Dorn nodded, then turned to look again from the window out across the canyon. His lithe form shivered as from sudden cold, although the head that he pressed against the pane was hot.

"He wants the number and initial of the car you are giving them," the girl said.

"Just a minute." Dorn stepped quickly across the room and consulted the record book. "Tell him it is B. R. & B. 76533."

When she had sent her reply they stood together at the window again looking down the track. Presently Dorn frowned. Along the narrow winding path beside the right of way a man slouched slowly forward.

"There's Whaley," said Dorn. "I wonder why I detest that man so, and I wonder even more why Malcom can tolerate him at the office."

"Hush!" warned the girl. "He would make a yellow enemy. But I know what you mean." As she spoke Whaley shambled in and leaned against the ledge of the ticket window.

"Mr. Malcom wants to know how soon we ca have an empty to load," he drawled. "It mu

be in first class condition. It's to be loaded with 'Sky High.'"

Dorn detected the smell of whisky on the man's breath and stepped between him and the girl. Miss Fraser shared Dorn's aversion and left the window for air.

"I have a car," said Dorn. "I will have it shifted to your canyon siding by noon."

"Do you know," confided Whaley, "this car goes to seaboard for rush delivery to the army in France. And a squad of Marines will go with it. Some car, that!" he added with a sickly grin.

"I wouldn't talk too much if I were you," snapped Dorn. "The least said about that car, the better."

Whaley hunched his rounded shoulders, looked about furtively for Miss Fraser, then left the station. She and Dorn watched Whaley as he walked back down the track. Ahead of him the town spread like an immense checker board on a smooth side hill.

"Somehow," said Dorn, "it just needed a glimpse of that snake to complete today's emotions. No other man would fit into the picture so well."

"Do you know," she shivered, "it seems as if

they were doing something all the time to make that canyon a regular death trap."

"And this new stuff is the worst yet," agreed Dorn. "It must be pretty dangerous and valuable to require a guard in transit. Such caution is unheard of."

"I always dread it every time you go down in there to check up the cars." She turned away quickly, regretting her words. They held a personal inference she had not intended.

"I don't mind that part," he replied. "But I do hate that canyon. I ran the mogul number 1750 six times a week over this division for more than two years. I never went into Bald Eagle Canyon from either end that I didn't feel as though I were going into hell. Why, every bird seemed to have a sad, mournful look; the crows that were loud and rancorous enough elsewhere never made a cry down there. I felt always as if Bald Eagle would give it to me some day." He stopped and paced back and forth with his eyes always on the track.

"And did it?" she breathed quickly.

"Yes, but it hasn't 'broke' me. It requires death to do that. In the spring, March, I was

coming down through here just after midnight with fifty full loads of coal behind me. It was raining so hard that a sheet of water was all I could see in the headlight. Malcom River was up to the track in places and running like a mill tail with a sound almost a roar that grew worse down by the powder mill in 'Malcom's Hole.' It made me think of hell fire roaring under forced draft.

"When I cleared the canyon on the other side I drew a long, joyful, relieved breath but that didn't last long for when I got to the bridge over Malcom's River there was nothing but the ties left. Number 1750 and I went in, with about all of those fifty loads on top of us."

"And then—?" Her dark eyes fired admiration and pity.

"When I got out of the surgeon's hands I was color blind and could not distinguish signals. The company said they wanted to do the right thing and gave me this station. That's all," he ended. "But I guess you can get the irony of it."

"Yes, I understand." She turned quickly, fearing he would watch the tears that threatened.

Chapter Two

WHALEY AT THE SENTRY BOX, AT the entrance of the canyon on his way back to the Works, stopped and gave the countersign; the guards at each end of Bald Eagle Canyon demanded it without variation. He proceeded down the canyon on the track beside the little river with a grave-yard whistle. The deathly stillness of the damp, oozing fissure never failed to fling a load on his soul. Whaley whistled louder as he neared the little switch that had been blasted out of the solid granite side of the canyon. There he turned directly right into a narrower slit in the granite into Malcom's Hole, where rubber-wheeled carriers on a narrow-gauge track brought all Malcom's product down from the works above, and transferred it to the regular freight cars of the railroad on the switch.

Whaley slunk up this corridor in the solid rock until he came to the high explosive buildings where Sky High was manufactured. At this

point he always had to flog his coward soul. He was edging along on the track between the concrete loading platform and the sheer stone sides that mounted nearly three hundred feet when he was startled to a shudder by a voice from the shadows.

"Wait a minute, Whaley! Why are you in such a devil of a rush?"

Whaley wheeled with a jerk to face Gregg, the high explosive foreman. "What do you want?" he whined a snarl. He approached the concrete platform and leaned against it heavily.

"Was you down to the station to see about that car?" asked the foreman.

"Yes, just came from there. Dorn says he will have it on the switch before noon." Whaley craned his neck to look in the warehouse. "But where's your stuff? You're not ready to load."

"It's all ready. You needn't be afraid to climb up on the platform and see for yourself." The foreman grinned and jerked his thumb toward the inside of the dark concrete room.

"I'll take your word for it. I don't want to get any nearer the damn stuff. But what would happen if it was to let loose down here?" Whaley edged away as he spoke.

"I can't say for sure, but I am certain of one thing: Saint Peter would have a new hand at his furnace, a fellow with a red nose, a liver as white as snow, and a yellow streak up his back as wide as your hand."

Whaley ventured a ghastly grin and continued on his way without reply to this merciless taunt and evidence that Gregg hated his coward soul. He wondered what it was about the Scotch blood that made it so unfeeling and why he had come to hate it since the war.

He passed a long series of concrete powder houses, the box factory and charcoal ovens, all clinging to one side of the street-like bottom of the 'hole' until he reached the upper end where it narrowed to almost nothing. He then began to mount a series of switch-back stairs used by employees. This took him over two hundred feet above, directly to the entrance of a one story office building of the same dark granite. This building was surrounded, as was the entire canyon, by a tall spiked iron fence anchored to the solid rock. The plan of the pioneer Malcom of roofing over the canyon had been long since abandoned for concrete constructions with individual roofs.

Whaley, entering the office, passed into a big room containing old-world counting-house desks among book-keepers and clerks on high stools. He went directly to the extreme rear corner where Malcom IV's private office was partitioned off.

Malcom looked up briskly as his messenger entered. Whaley stood at respectful distance, hat in hand.

"Dorn says he will have a car on our switch before noon," he informed. "The local freight will set it in. He has one in the station yard that will do."

"Did he give you the name and number of the car?" Malcom's sharp eyes looked out from under a frame of gray hair above an angular surface of rugged vitality.

"No."

"When is the local due?"

"It is due now. I heard it whistle at the lower end of Bald Eagle just now."

"Go back to the switch, stay there until they set that car in, examine it carefully for flat wheels, take a good snap shot of it, and bring me three prints. Come back by way of the post office and get the eastern mail."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Malcom," replied Whaley, and cringed back out of the great powder maker's office. He unlocked a drawer in the end of an unused desk, took from it a large sized Kodak and began an exact backtrack of the course he just had followed to the office. As usual when he approached the high explosive houses his feet became lead.

"This whole damn plant ought to be in hell," he whined, as craven fear thumped a drink-impaired stomach. He arrived at the switch just as the engine was leaving and he noticed that it had set in five cars. Only one was in position beside the loading platform and the narrow-gauge from the mill.

Whaley took an exposure of both sides of the car and another which included all of them. He then passed the ends of his cigarette-yellowed fingers carefully around the surface to detect flat wheels on the car. After taking a furtive look about him, he lighted a cigarette, an act positively forbidden, and made his way up the track through the canyon to the station.

He craned his neck through the ticket window. "Mr. Dorn in?" he inquired blandly of Miss Fraser.

"No, not just now. Anything I can do?"

"I just came from the canyon switch and you set in several cars. I suppose the one in loading position is intended for us?" He wondered how it was that Betty Fraser appeared to be more attractive today than usual.

"They were short of room on the warehouse track here," she replied after consulting a memorandum on Dorn's desk, "and took several cars down there, but the B. R. & B. 76533 is yours."

"All right. I just wanted to make sure." Leering he left for the post office.

Whaley was lazy: he had a downright aversion to anything except bibulous activity. He started for a traveling photographer's tent on a vacant lot not far out of his way. The man had generously offered to develop his films for the sake of a friendship formed recently at the bar in the Barrel House.

Malvoney, the black-mustached, middle-aged photographer, who might be taken for an Italian, a Frenchman or a Turk, rose as his visitor entered the tent.

"I've got three shots here of some cars on the

siding," began Whaley. "And if they're not good — Well, you know the Old Man."

"Most certainly, my friend, I can develop them immediately," cut in Malvoney. "Sit down. It's a hot day, but you'll find it comfortable here." He offered the one camp chair and fan he was using. The residents of Malcom settlement had to rely on itinerant photographers and this year they were fortunate in Mr. Malvoney's advent, for he had an especially complete tent outfit and was manifestly a superior artist.

"No, can't stop. On my way to the post office. If you don't mind I will stop on my way back. If the negatives are good make four prints from each one. That hole where I have to develop is like a Turkish bath this time of year."

"Don't mention it. I was just wishing for something to do. Go down to the post office and I will have them ready by the time you get back, if you don't hurry too much," he beamed.

"All right, Malvoney, much obliged. I won't be gone long." Whaley lighted another cigarette and started toward the post office. He stopped several times to gossip and looked with almost uncontrollable longing toward the Barrel House, but fear of Malcom finally passed him on thirsty.

At the post office a small package of mail carefully tied was waiting for him. He retraced his steps, again reluctantly passed the Barrel House and did not pause until he reached the awning of a hardware store. He sat down on a spool of barbed wire which he carefully insulated from his body by the package of mail. He proceeded to visit with the gossiping proprietor, thus giving his accommodating friend time to develop his films and make the prints.

When he reached the tent the photographer greeted him with a smiling shake of his head. "You are not improving in your camera work as you should," he said.

"What's the matter now?" asked Whaley.

"Two of your pictures were good, but the other was impossible." Malvoney produced the two prints taken of the car at the loading position. This was easily distinguished as both sides of a new car, B. R. & B. 76533.

"Well, these will do. All the old man wants is to see that the car is there, a new car, and to make sure of the number. Foxy old guy! These pictures never lie."

"And you, my friend, who have become such an adept at this kind of camera work, should not

grow careless," purred Malvoney. "I have told you often that you are an artist born. You have the fingers as well as the instincts of the artist, and if you would devote just a little time each day to your natural cleverness, you soon would make your mark." He spoke with full evidence of sincerity.

"Don't fill me up with a lot of bunk. I am dissatisfied enough now," replied Whaley.

"It isn't what you call bunk. I mean every word. But we can talk it over up-town tonight. I'll see you at the Barrel House?"

"You sure will. So long till tonight," and Whaley started back to the office.

He made his report to Mr. Malcom and handed him the photographs. Malcom at once called Dorn by telephone and verified the number and condition of the car. "And now, Mr. Dorn," he concluded, "we have those cases ready in our finished warehouse. I wish you would look them over and count them there before we begin loading tomorrow morning. It might save delay."

"All right, Mr. Malcom. I can do even better. I have late advice that Lieutenant Pettingill is arriving early in the morning, ten

hours in advance of the squad that will guard the car in transit. I will bring him with me tomorrow morning to see the cases where they now stand, before they have been moved."

"Splendid, and then he will be sufficiently impressed with the necessary caution. We will leave it that way, Mr. Dorn. Goodbye." Malcom abruptly ended the conversation and returned to his secretary.

"Whaley," he directed, "be sure and have your camera outfit ready to get good pictures of this car immediately it is loaded tomorrow afternoon, for use on the bill of lading and copies, and let there be no mistake."

During the remainder of the day the cunning insinuations of Malvoney worked on Whaley and it was with lively interest that he arrived early in the evening at the Barrel House. Glorious freedom from the strict Scotch custom; liquor without stint and the animal satisfied. He found Malvoney waiting for him. They selected a small table apart from the rest and Whaley at once launched upon the problem nearest his heart after an unduly liberal tipple on Malvoney.

"Do you really think I could make a hit if I

were to shake this dump and go out and hustle?" he asked across the filthy board.

"I not only think so, but I know so, my boy. All you need is a good start," assured the photographer.

"I know I never shall amount to anything here. Sometimes I feel like taking the first train and getting out of this damn place." Whaley's enlarging pupils betrayed that he had taken several drinks just to tune up before meeting Malvoney.

"Whaley, what would you give if I could not only fix it so that you could leave and take no chances at all, but be kept up until you make good?" Malvoney looked through the wide open eyes clear into the craven soul of his companion.

"I would give an arm, a leg, anything but my life, if I could shake the place and get something good outside." Whaley leaned forward with inebriate frenzy.

"And I am fortunately in a position to help you do it. I shall ask so little in return that you will be surprised."

"I don't care what it is. I'll do it. Just name the poison."

"All right, Whaley, I will take you at your word and I am going to trust you." He produced an envelope from his pocket. "Here's ten ten-dollar bills, and when you have helped me a little, just a little, I will make it just ten times as much."

Chapter Three

WHEN DORN RETURNED TO THE station after an early evening meal he found Miss Fraser in a state of repressed excitement. She rose when he entered and spoke quickly.

"Mr. Dorn, several times since you've been gone I have noticed something queer about the wireless."

He showed instant concern and moved toward the booth in the corner containing it.

"It may be nothing," she went on. "The machine is new to me and I cannot tell, but I think we should investigate. I have gained the impression that other messages are being sent to some nearby station."

"The nearest station of which I know is Pittsburg west," said Dorn, "Harrisburg east; none south, or north either, until Rochester, Buffalo or Ogdensburg."

"I don't believe it is as far away as any of

those points; but I have heard them distinctly and persistently, sometimes strong enough to make a flash, all afternoon. At first I thought atmospheric conditions were so good that we were getting the signal calls from ships at sea. They evidently are using the continental code and you know you have not taught me that yet. I wish they would begin calling now for you to hear. As far as I could make out they have not raised the desired station yet, and they may begin again."

"Take the book home tonight," he suggested, "and study the continental Morse code and we will practice it every day. It is important that you should know both."

Dorn gathered his long legs up under his change drawer below the ticket window to make up his cash for the day, but when the first stroke on the wireless receiver sounded, he shut the cash drawer with a snap and rose.

"There," she cried, "that is the very call that has been on the receiver several times this afternoon." She came to the door of the booth and watched his face intently.

She saw Dorn become immovable for some minutes. Then cautiously he cut out the lightly

charged wire ordinarily in use and carefully switched in a hundred horse-power voltage that set up a high resonance and gave the instruments a radius of two thousand miles.

"They are *very* close," he said, "and are calling F. L. in international code." She stood tensely alert. The discovery of another wireless station up there at the top of the mountains in their isolation was like finding an interloper, a huge rattler in their path, a criminal in their house.

For more than a quarter of an hour they remained silent, both seeing and hearing the two dots, dash and dot of the F, and the dot dash and two dots of the L, reproduced with important persistence. These two letters of the continental code the girl would not soon forget.

"This fellow can't reach over two hundred miles, so that he is reaching for an interior land station," Dorn commented.

Soon after to their further intense excitement an answer did come, faint but undoubtedly an answer. "Who is calling? F. L. prove yourself," the distant station slowly spelled out in international code which Miss Fraser did not know, but Dorn wrote plainly so she could see it over his shoulder.

"A friend, L. A.," came from the close-by station. "And I give today's password." Louvera was slowly spelled out. "Right; been trying to get you."

"Heard you, was afraid until now," quickly came from perhaps two hundred miles.

"Are you safe now?" asked the station Dorn knew was very near.

"Yes, are you?"

"Perfectly, am trusted here," replied the near station.

"Go ahead then, but in cipher, and hurry through, as I might have to leave any time. I draw so much power I weaken the lights on this circuit," replied the distant station.

"All right, send this to New York by messenger tonight if your relay is not safe," immediately began Dorn's neighbor, and then followed a long message in cipher which Dorn wrote on the white paper in front of him. The message ended suddenly without signature or any indication of the sender's exact location, but the operator did want it relayed or sent by messenger, New York, as something of great importance.

"What do you make out of it?" she inquired breathlessly, not realizing in her excitement that

she was putting considerable weight on Dorn's shoulder.

"It means," he hesitated in order to study the words used in the code, "that there is another wireless station right here, or within a few miles of here, that has a different password every day, and," he narrowed the gray of his eyes as if to pierce the mystery of the white paper he held, "it means the enemy has established a wireless station here, to report Malcom's powder and dynamite deliveries and especially the new explosive — and elsewhere, too."

"And what?" she asked, impatient at his deliberation.

"And — I don't know just what." He came slowly out of the little booth and began to walk the floor. "The audacity and boldness is startling."

"Shouldn't we tell Mr. Malcom at once?" she asked, her eyes firing.

"We should. But — this message — perhaps not until we are sure of its nature."

"Yes," agreed Miss Fraser, "it may not be anything, but the station is illicit; that's a Federal violation. How can we check this thing up? Isn't there some way to discover who or

what this is? How would it do to tell Washington about it?"

"Not by wireless. How do we know," he considered, "that one or more illicit stations would not get us? The only way would be to get the Washington telegraph wire."

"That wire is not open to us until after seven at night."

"Was today the first you noticed of this strange station?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I believe we should not be in too big a hurry. They will grow bold with a little time," suggested Dorn, seemingly relieved to be able to control his inclination to undue haste.

"I believe you are right. Take time to think about it. I'll be back soon," she promised as she got her hat to go home to her evening meal. This was her week to return at seven and stay until Number 22, the passenger, went east at ten-fifteen.

"I'll wait until you come back," he agreed but greatly disturbed.

When she returned he noticed an increased agitation in her manner. "Why is it," she began abruptly, "that Mr. Malcom keeps about him

such a man as that despicable Whaley? As I passed the Barrel House he and that foreign looking photographer were standing outside. Both had been drinking and Whaley called out to me." She shivered.

Dorn clenched his fist. "He'll do that once too often," he said savagely. "I detest that whelp. He's no kind of man to have round a place like this. Mr. Malcom will wake up to that fact sometime, and let's hope before it is too late. Don't forget," he spoke more gently, "call me if you want me." He hesitated near the door. "But why is that photographer spending his time with Whaley, I wonder? Guess I'll just drop in at the Barrel House as I go by to my dinner; but be careful — it's best to think it over till tomorrow."

Chapter Four

THE NEXT MORNING DORN ENtered the station heavy-eyed and haggard, yet tensely alert. Miss Fraser looked up with a bright smile, simulating cheerfulness.

"You don't look as if you slept much last night," she greeted.

"Neither do you." He returned her smile as he unlocked the ticket cabinet.

"I didn't," she replied. "Has anything new developed?" She set a tomato-can on the table, by the bay-window, and proceeded to arrange some wild flowers she had picked on the way.

"No. The first thing is to go over to Malcom's Hole as soon as Lieutenant Pettingill shows up, and inspect the goods." He moved to her side as she bent over the flowers. "But somehow," he continued, "I can't get over the promptings of my sixth sense of evil omen. I felt the same way the day I went through the bridge just below

Bald Eagle Canyon." He looked from her face to the flowers she was still arranging. "And then, too," he added, "I wish you were out of this hole. It's no place for a woman like you."

She flushed. "Nothing could make me leave now," she said in a low tone. "Perhaps I can't do much to help, yet it brings me into closer realization of the barbaric realities of this war, and I must do all I can." She looked at him earnestly and watched the slight up-turn of the corners of his strong mouth that indicated a moment's return of his natural optimism.

"You are right," he agreed gently, "the only way is to do the best we can without flinching, and then let the devil do his worst."

Further conversation was prevented by a heavy but lively tread in the waiting room, and a strong good-natured voice at the ticket window.

"I am looking for Mr. Dorn."

"I am the man," replied Dorn moving forward.

"I am Lieutenant Pettingill, sent from Washington to guard a shipment to an Atlantic port." The stranger offered his hand as he finished the self-introduction.

"I have been expecting you, Lieutenant Pettingill; come in." Dorn unlocked the door and the

Lieutenant entered the ticket office. Power to command men was stamped on his face.

"Lieutenant, the shipper has rather an unpleasant duty mapped out for us as a move preliminary to loading this freight," said Dorn, after introducing Miss Fraser and finding a chair for the officer.

"What is that, Mr. Dorn?" came from the clear-eyed, ideal fighting man.

"He thinks it advisable that both you and I inspect the physical condition of the packages, counting them while still in the factory, and he also wants to acquaint you further with enough of the nature of the stuff, so that unusual precautions can be used against accident."

"I want to do anything at all that will make the safe delivery of this product more certain," agreed the officer instantly. "If anything should happen from any cause whatever, whether I am to blame or not, it's hara-kiri for me. I wouldn't have the courage to face my superior. For that reason I was detailed nine picked men and a Petty. Of course you know I am responsible only when this car is incorporated in a train and transit actually begun. However, I am glad to go with you and learn more about this stuff."

"All right then, we'll go to the office first and meet Mr. Malcom. Miss Fraser, I am uncertain when I will return, but should you need me call the powder works," he instructed as he and Lieutenant Pettingill left.

"I am struck with the fascinating wildness of this place," began the Lieutenant as Dorn led the way on a short cut through the woods to the powder mill office. "I notice, too, a foreign cast, or at least a primitive appearance, of the people."

"Primitive," said Dorn, "but American for over two hundred years. And patriots to the last hair of their heads. A pro-German would last as long here as a fly before a toad."

They emerged from the wood lot and came in sight of the low stone office of the powder plant, with its high spiked iron fence.

"This man Malcom," Dorn explained, "is the last male descendant of the Malcoms. All this section, underlaid with millions of dollars worth of coal, still belongs to him as a part of a royal grant, and this whole town is made up of descendants of those Scotchmen who worked for the original Malcom."

"I suppose he increases the size of his plant to take care of the natural increase of the town's

population, which must be several thousand," ventured Lieutenant Pettingill.

"That's about it, and they are pretty good breeders, but every soul here actually loves Malcom, acknowledging him as a sort of ruler, and each one takes a personal interest in the works as though part owner." As Dorn talked they entered the office. Whaley went to announce them.

"This fellow here," said Dorn as they stood waiting, "is the only exception to the rule. Take a good look at him when he returns. To me he appears like a sheep-killing dog."

"Don't you compliment him. I happen to know what a sheep-killing dog is," replied the Lieutenant. He evidently had taken Whaley's measure instantly, who now approached and led them to Mr. Malcom's office.

Malcom rose with outstretched hand. "Lieutenant Pettingill," he greeted, "if all our navy personnel is as well conditioned as you, my confidence increases." He turned to Dorn with the same sincerity. "And Friend Dorn, how do you prosper this morning?"

"Following your yesterday's suggestions," began Dorn at once, "I have brought Lieutenant

Pettingill over to inspect and count with me that load of cases before it leaves your warehouse."

"I still think it a wise precaution, and am very glad you both came. I will send some one with you, but before you go I want to explain the nature of this product which has not yet revealed itself completely even to us. It is a mighty force which appears to resist analysis. Please step out this way to the laboratory."

Malcom led the way to a small structure completely detached by two hundred feet, built like a fortress of granite boulders on the solid rock of the mountain top. He invited them through a door that would resist common shot into a single room perhaps twenty by forty feet whose small windows had prismatic glass, preventing an inward view. The room was fitted with every possible device for working out problems in chemistry.

"Now, gentlemen," began Malcom, as they stood near a small table in the center of the natural granite floor, "I will make short cuts, for time is limited. This explosive we are shipping has from twelve to twenty times greater striking power than any other yet compounded in commercial quantities. We do not claim this is a new

invention. Its discovery was made a long time ago by an English chemist, who after many efforts made only one laboratory sample. This feat he never was able to repeat, and was finally killed in the attempt.

"Urged by the necessities of this great war, my chemist with three assistants, to whom all the credit is due for its completion, worked on what records were left by the discoverer until he was able to produce in commercial quantities."

"You are generous to give your chemists credit," Lieutenant Pettingill interrupted.

"There is plenty of honor left for all of us, you included," replied he, beaming on both men. "Unless it is safely transported it is the same as though not made. Its use is the pivot upon which the war will turn in our favor. However, that is only my opinion. I want to demonstrate to you the difficulties my men had in combining the constituent parts to make this deadly explosive. This knowledge will aid you in the handling of it."

He stepped to a shelf at the side, hesitated a moment before selecting two half-gallon containers, which he brought to a table in the center and then went to the far end for something else.

"He seems to know what he's about," said the Lieutenant.

"I sincerely hope he does," shuddered Dorn. "This is a place where chemists have worked on explosives for two hundred years. It's too much like a tomb to suit with those great boulders in the walls and those little windows."

Malcom returned to them with two shallow porcelain pans and placed them on the little table, one in front of each of the glass containers, and still silent and solely attentive to his own movements he put a single drop in the dish opposite each glass, then returned the containers to the shelf.

"Now," he said, "to show what enemies the two fluids are under ordinary conditions I will touch the point of this rod to one and then to the other." Motioning them away a little he picked up a solid glass rod drawn to a needle's point and hardly pierced the drop of one fluid. Then hesitating a moment he placed the point in contact with the other drop of liquid. There was an instant flash that seemed to fill the room. Dorn and Pettingill instinctively covered their eyes and turned toward the door.

"A minute quantity unresisted is quite harmless,

but you get an idea what might happen if even the two whole drops were put together," smiled Malcom as he replaced the glass rod in the drawer from which he had taken it.

"And that flash came from just what was on the point of that rod?" asked Pettingill, incredulous.

"Just so," assured Malcom solemnly.

"And others have made these two parts, but were unable to combine and stabilize them?" asked Dorn in excitement.

"Except one, and that was an accident from which nothing could be deduced in the way of practice, but was enough to prove its stupendous importance as an explosive, and that is all with which my man had to work.

"After long, dangerous and expensive experiments he was able to unite those two elements under certain favorable vibrationless conditions only down in the bottom of the canyon where my factory is protected by the natural granite walls. And regarding its quick and safe arrival our government as well as our allies are deeply concerned."

"Then you were able to succeed, where the others failed?" asked Lieutenant Pettingill.

"Yes, and our discovery was almost accidental,

too. It is wholly a matter of vibration. You might naturally think this laboratory, with its solid stone walls three or four feet thick and its granite floor would have no vibration, but it is exposed to the open air which is a perfect medium of conveying oscillations. Of this even wireless telegraphy gives us only a hint. Then we blasted a room out of the solid granite at the bottom of the canyon. Here are only slight physical disturbances. It was that room, deep in the solid rock, my chemists asked for, to compound this most powerful explosive. It took courage; they faced death. Now it can be handled with comparatively little danger, but I warn you," Malcom hesitated and raised his hand impressively, "that while we know how to create one condition to detonate it, there may be, and I think there are, other ways to cause it to explode of which we yet know nothing."

"And that is why you counsel great caution, Mr. Malcom?" asked Dorn, realizing more completely what he had been dealing with every day in smaller shipments.

"What would happen if some of the unknown conditions were created or some mistake were made in your factory?" asked the Lieutenant.

"I never dare to speculate on that," said Malcom gravely; "if I should attempt it, I'd grow sick and dizzy. I believe that the whole mountain top would go, with the town and everything in it. I assure you I consent to make it only as a patriotic duty and that its manufacture will be discontinued immediately the war necessity is absent."

Chapter Five

LIEUTENANT PETTINGILL AND Dorn turned in quick appreciation toward the grizzled manufacturer who thus had delivered himself. Here was a man owning a half county of coal lands, a good sized town with the powder works and possessing, more than all, the love and good-will of every man in it, doing for peace with liberty for the world.

Silently by common consent they moved toward the door of the fortress-like laboratory and out into the sunlight.

"Will you come to the office a moment before going to the plant?" asked Malcom.

"I am impressed with the fact," broke in the Lieutenant, "that no soldier ought to complain when he has to face bullets only part of the time while you and the whole town are living in constant danger and uncertainty."

"If there is merit in my work as you say," said Malcom quietly, "I am glad. Yet I take no

credit to myself. My people all know, and don't. I believe there are millions of men who are doing as much and who are looking for no reward." His mind grasped business again placidly as they reached his office. "Mr. Dorn, I am able to know from a photograph that you have given us a good car. Is this the one?" He produced the print made by Malvoney for Whaley. "I use the camera in such cases to make doubly sure."

"B. R. & B. 76533," Dorn read from the photograph. "Yes, Mr. Malcom, that is the car I intended for you."

"Very good. Now, Lieutenant Pettingill, in bidding you goodbye I will express again my earnest desire that you will be successful in your mission." Malcom shook hands earnestly. "And, Mr. Dorn," he added, "while I shall see you often, for your sake I also wish a happy ending to an enterprise we shall all follow with a fervent interest until it is reported successful." Malcom turned to his desk and the two men, in serious thought, left him.

The officer looked about him curiously as they left the building. "All the time I have been here," he remarked, "I have been wondering

where the big plant is. I have seen no signs of it."

"You shall see in a moment," replied Dorn. "There, you can get a pretty good view of it." They halted where a long row of concrete buildings some several stories high could be seen. These buildings clung to one side of the bottom of the canyon for a thousand feet and resembled a mud nest of swallows under the eaves two and three hundred feet below them. The narrow-gauge railroad on the other side looked like a delicate decorative line.

"Great Heavens, man! Is that where it is? It must be three hundred feet to the bottom!" exclaimed the lieutenant as he stood in wonder. "Now I can better understand what Mr. Malcom meant when he said that the explosive was compounded down in the granite, and I am sure if there is a place on earth where there would be a minimum of vibration it is down there."

"To me," said Dorn, "this deep slit in these solid rocks on the top of the mountain was created expressly so that this factory might be worked in the bottom of it." Dorn led the way to the substantial stairs which extended to the bottom of the cave-like place. "And before you get out

of it you will see other things that will make you wonder."

"Not to have an elevator is primitive," Pettingill remarked.

"Yes, but in avoiding such up-to-date detail Malcom is able to accomplish the profound," smiled Dorn.

When they reached the bottom they walked quickly past the charcoal ovens that nestled like immense conical bee hives, each giving off from its centre a rare incense of hickory wood being converted to carbon. They passed the many powder house buildings to enter the high explosive plant where they were met by the neat-coated foreman, Griggs. He gave a hand to assist Pettingill up to the waist-high loading platform, level with the car door and the storehouse.

"You want to see the freight we are going to load this morning?" The foreman, who spoke in a low pleasant tone, appeared chastened by constant contact with the deadly material.

"Yes, Mr. Griggs. And shake hands with Lieutenant Pettingill who will have personal charge of this shipment while in transit," replied Dorn while his long legs negotiated the platform without effort.

"Mr. Malcom sent word you were on your way and I have been waiting for you to see the load before I began to move it down to the canyon switch into the car." Griggs led the way back into the concrete warehouse to a stock of small cases arranged on the floor in the exact manner they would occupy a fifty-foot car.

"You seem to be pretty careful about packing them," said the Lieutenant.

"Yes, the case is made of inch hardwood material, carefully nailed and bound with strap iron at each end." The foreman went to the corner of the pile and pushed the top case out for better inspection.

"Each one weighs about fifty pounds, I should judge," said the Lieutenant. He raised the corner of the little case. It would have been easy to carry under the arm were it not for its lead-like weight. The Malcom trade mark, a stag's head, was burned in each end, with two letters, S. H., below it.

"Yes, fifty pounds net," replied Griggs, "the specific gravity of the product is so great that the package is small. You can easily count them. They are tiered seven high, and forty long and seven wide, one thousand nine hundred and

sixty in all. And, Mr. Dorn, from measuring the car you have sent in, we calculate that this is exactly the way they will be arranged, with a little padding of the car sides. You can check them up easily after they are loaded by this arrangement."

"That makes it simple enough," approved Dorn as he verified the amount by tiers.

At that moment as if propelled by a phantom, a perfectly noiseless flat car about twenty feet long appeared at the wide door of the warehouse on the narrow-gauge track. Its motive power was soon discovered when a half dozen lusty workmen raised themselves to the platform and approached the pile to begin loading.

"All right, boys, go ahead," said Griggs. Each man took up a single case and started with it to the rubber-wheeled flat car outside with a sureness of foot and certainty of grasp and general care that evidently had become a habit.

"These boys handle it carefully enough," approved Lieutenant Pettingill as they moved toward the door.

"Yes, they do," replied the foreman. "Each man here knows full well what would happen if they make a mistake."

"Have you ever had accidents?" asked Dorn. They now were outside on the platform watching the pile of cases grow on the flat car.

"We don't talk of our inside work, Mr. Dorn," replied Griggs respectfully, "we have our troubles. I am willing to tell you that. For reasons we know nothing about at times we are unable to mix any of this stock for several days."

"You refer to natural causes?" asked Lieutenant Pettingill.

"Yes, at such times the whole earth seems out of tune. The regular rhythm of vibrations are disturbed and to attempt then to combine the ingredients of S. H. is death. And at no time can we do anything when there is a train moving through Bald Eagle Canyon. That it should vibrate this whole granite mountain seems impossible, but we know that it does. We know we have a sentry all the time at each entrance who telephones the approach of a train going either way, and we have to suspend operations until the train has gone. And thanks to the way you have your schedules arranged, Mr. Dorn, we have to do most of this work at night." Griggs seemed fascinated into freer speech by the stocky officer in uniform and the tall, thin man with

the eagle's beak and close cropped ears who leaned toward him absorbing each word as he uttered it.

"Why do you mark each case with S. H. under the stag's head?" asked Dorn. The rubber wheeled car before them had reached its complement of load and began its progress slowly, propelled by man power toward the mouth of the 'hole' where it joined Bald Eagle Canyon, Malcom River and the main line of the railroad, and the switch where they loaded everything for shipment.

"That means something to Mr. Malcom," replied Griggs. "The boys here call it 'Sky High.' And not a bad name, either, when you know how wicked it is."

"You are far from comforting," smiled Pettingill wryly, "when I am compelled to make this lot of stuff my bed-fellow for about five hundred miles. But let us hope for the best, Mr. Griggs." Pettingill shook hands with the foreman as he and Dorn started down toward the switch. "Anyway, I have the comfort of knowing I won't be simply wounded, which after all is my only fear."

They approached the mouth of the 'hole'

where the little flat car stood beside a small concrete platform opposite the freight car.

"This 'hole' seems to get deeper as we go farther down," remarked the Lieutenant.

"Yes, this is where it joins what is called Bald Eagle Canyon and our main line. You see now it is near mid-day and yet the sun hardly gets into this hole. It resembles a well with its two sides knocked out."

"Don't this whole thing get on your nerves, Mr. Dorn? For my part, I'd rather face the Boches' cannon." Pettingill stopped as he heard the gentle roar of the swift moving waters of the little river in the canyon, where an ordinary sound echoed with increasing volume.

"Yes, lately it has been getting me hard," admitted Dorn. "But I should hate myself as a coward if I quit." Then suddenly he changed the subject. "Your Marines will be up on the four-thirty train this afternoon, Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"They will just about have the car loaded by that time."

"As soon as they come I will detail a guard for it, though you know it is fully understood

I am not responsible officially until it is made part of the train and actually under way."

They started up the canyon toward the station with a feeling of relief that they were coming out of the 'hole' once more without accident.

Chapter Six

SOON AFTER DORN RETURNED from his tour of inspection Mr. Malcom telephoned that the car would be loaded and ready for his seal about three.

"All right," Dorn answered briskly. "Lieutenant Pettingill will be here by that time and we will come down to the switch at once."

"That's good. Griggs will stay there until you verify contents and conditions and give him the bill of lading. Whaley will come also to get photographs to attach to the bill of lading and copies, as soon as you have sealed and formally bound the railroad company for its safety."

"I shall use extreme care, Mr. Malcom. Lieutenant Pettingill's squad of marines will arrive on Number 22, the 4.30 passenger, and he will send them to guard the car from the time they arrive until it actually begins to roll."

"Tell the Lieutenant that I have provided a

'feed' which will be brought to the men in the canyon during their watch. I am going to give them a Highland Scot style barbecued pig. It is roasting now."

"They'll be tickled for that, Mr. Malcom," Dorn replied laughing as he hung up the receiver.

Several times Dorn had been on the point of expressing his suspicions to Malcom, but he felt that to mention fears which might prove groundless would add further to the man's already heavy worries. But he determined to keep awake to the possibilities of the menace and to ask for Mr. Malcom's assistance the moment anything definite developed.

Lieutenant Pettingill came to the ticket office on time and Dorn conveyed to him Malcom's message.

"Shall we have time to go down and attend to the bill of lading before the train with my men arrives?" The Lieutenant consulted his watch.

"Yes, I think so. It won't take long and we have over an hour." Dorn then turned to Miss Fraser. "If by any chance we do not get back before the train gets in, the detail of marines will wait here for Lieutenant Pettingill."

"I understand," Miss Fraser replied, with that troubled softness that came to her tone every time he went into the canyon.

They walked to the platform and turned west toward the guard house at the mouth of the canyon. The officer halted and faced about, evidently attracted by the peculiar topography where the canyon entered into the little valley, the edge of the site for Malcom town.

"This is a most peculiar situation," he commented. "The railroad and stream start down here as if they were going straight to hell on a solid granite bed, but this little valley and the slope beyond make an ideal site for the town."

"Yes, being at the top of the mountain it is very healthy. People never die up here. They just dry up and quit. But do you see that cliff off to the left there across the river from the station? I found a way to use it. From its top it is a sheer descent of nearly eight hundred feet. When I first came up here, more to kill time than anything else, I installed a private wireless station. My sending and receiving wires you can see coming down from its apex. It is one hundred feet higher than any government station and I am able to reach a long way with

very little power. I felt that I thus was in touch with the great outside world."

"Fine! And you still have it?" Pettingill turned toward the guard whom Dorn approached and gave the password. The man volunteered that he had received telephone instructions to pass the officer.

"Yes," resumed Dorn, as they started into the canyon on the main track. "And when Malcom heard of it, instead of making me tear it out, as he could have done, he told me to make heavier wire connections and draw on him for all the power I wanted. I did that and when the new law went into effect putting private wireless out of business he helped me get an official O. K. on this one as a military necessity. He uses it now secretly in all his important transactions with the government and elsewhere."

They now rounded a little curve in the canyon and found Griggs and Whaley waiting for them.

"Are you ready?" greeted Dorn.

"All ready," replied Griggs, vaulting to the little concrete platform, on a level with the car floor. "You see the cases are arranged as I said exactly as I had them on the floor of the warehouse, seven tiers, forty long and seven high."

Captain Pettingill and Dorn joined the foreman at the car door, leaving Whaley on the ground to find a good angle from which to get his pictures. "That seems quite right," replied Dorn, after he had climbed in and carefully counted the cases.

"What is that material you have used between the layers?" asked Lieutenant Pettingill.

"That is wool felt," replied Griggs, "the most resilient packing we can find. It is a quarter of an inch thick. I put four thicknesses on the floor of the car and a single thickness between each layer, and this three inch space at the sides and ends is completely filled with it to protect the cases from being jarred. The felt I have used to pack this car with is worth almost as much as a carload of ordinary powder."

"It ought to carry that way, Griggs. You couldn't do much more unless we put in a baby carriage," laughed Dorn. He shut the door after Griggs had adjusted an immense pad of felt to fill in the space between the cases and the door.

"Mr. Dorn, how difficult would it be for any one to duplicate that seal you are putting on?" asked Lieutenant Pettingill. He watched Dorn as he shut and locked the door, introduced the

steel pin in metal hasp, introduced steel strip and squeezed the leaden seal, thus fastening the ends together and leaving the station's number plainly stamped.

"It would be quite a bit of trouble," answered Dorn. "But the main protection, and the menace to any one contemplating such an act, is the severe punishment entailed. Railroads consider their seals as sacred and mercilessly prosecute under special statutes provided for the slightest infraction." Dorn dropped off the platform and started toward the door on the opposite end. Griggs and Lieutenant Pettingill followed. The same process of sealing was repeated there in their presence.

"Now as this car has solid pressed steel ends with no openings," explained Dorn, "the two side doors I have just sealed are all for which we have to look out. It's all sealed now, Whaley," he called, "you can take your picture."

"Isn't that an unusual precaution?" asked Pettingill as he stepped out of range of Whaley's camera.

"It's Mr. Malcom's rule, and a good one, too, in the case of his dangerous freight. It proves beyond doubt that each door was properly

sealed and that the car was in first class condition when loaded, showing that both the consignee and the consignor have taken ample precaution against accidents."

"Now, Whaley," asked Griggs, "have you a double exposure, showing both sides and ends?"

"Yes, sir," promptly replied Whaley.

"All right, now get a double exposure at close range, showing plainly the doors locked and the seals properly placed."

"From their attitude toward this stuff I believe Mr. Malcom's statement that it was a ticklish and uncertain proposition rather conservative, ventured the Lieutenant with a wry smile.

"Now, Mr. Dorn, is that all?" Griggs asked as he and Whaley returned. "Are we through now?"

"Yes, it's our risk now, Griggs," replied Dorn. "The up-train due here in a half hour will bring Lieutenant Pettingill's marines and he will post a guard on the car until 7.30 picks it up tonight."

Dorn and Lieutenant Pettingill walked back up the canyon mostly in silence. Dorn halted on the track and looked over at the water's edge at a huge water snake near the bank, and by

odd coincidence at that moment Whaley, too, slunk along the canyon side.

Pettingill shuddered. "I know I am not afraid of bullets," he declared. "But I am of a snake." He stared at the threatening forked tongue that came out frequently.

"I, too, fear snakes," said Dorn, but his eyes were not on the reptile, but on the man who slunk past them. He stooped to select a stone from the road bed and with unerring skill hurled the stone and crushed the snake's head. "I wish I could rid the country of all its enemies as easily."

"Whom do you consider our worst enemies?" asked the Lieutenant thoughtfully.

"Our worst enemies are not under arms, but the cursed hordes we have among us, the spies and the cowards. They are the snakes."

Whaley turned, and for a moment the eyes of the two men met.

Chapter Seven

BEFORE DORN AND PETTINGILL reached the station they heard the long shriek of locomotive number 22 as it approached the lower canyon's entrance.

The officer shuddered. "That sounds like the triumphant siren gloating over a lost soul."

Dorn shivered and tried to laugh aside his own morbid presentiment. He hurried the Lieutenant toward the depot where he saw Miss Fraser beckoning. The girl handed him a telegram she just had taken, also a wireless message from Washington.

Before Dorn finished reading the messages the train thundered into the station and stopped.

The next moment Petty Officer Starke, followed by nine marines, left the rear car and gathered on the platform. The Lieutenant approached the little group and received their grave salute. He issued his orders in a few words and the men

on the instant formed a line and swung down the track toward the car they were to guard.

Dorn found that the messages just received were for Pettingill and handed them to the Lieutenant with his explanation. "The superintendent says he will supply you with a car to be attached to express freight seventeen. It will arrive at 7.30 tonight which picks up this load you will guard. He will give you a short passenger car with bunks, a kitchen and a station outfit used by civil engineers.

"And the wireless from Washington," Dorn went on, "orders that every member of the train crew shall be sworn into service. That is, the engineer, fireman, conductor and the three brakemen must be called in here to take the same oath that soldiers utter when they enter the service. Both Miss Fraser and I were sworn into military service before we were allowed to send wireless messages to Washington."

"It's a fine idea," agreed the Lieutenant, "but do you suppose they'll object?"

"If they do it's pretty good evidence their hearts are wrong. There's nothing we can do now until the train comes in at 7.30."

"That being the case," said Pettingill, "I'll

go back to the hotel and will show up before the train is due. If you should need me, telephone. Officer Starke will look after things down here."

As he left the station both Dorn and Miss Fraser turned quickly to the wireless instrument.

"It's that same call," she cried, "and he's been at it as persistently as yesterday. Although I was working with Washington just after you left for the canyon he seems entirely without knowledge, or else is careless of our existence."

"He evidently is operating on stolen current," said Dorn. "I have made arrangements with our power plant to cut out certain wards during the day, so we can get a line on the district this fellow is calling from if he is right here. Did you notice the new telephone I connected last night?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"To avoid any possible espionage I have a private wire connecting directly with Parsons, at the power plant." As Dorn spoke he made connection and the next moment had his man. "Mr. Parsons," he began, "our friend is calling on the wireless now. You say you have four feed wires lighting the town?"

"Yes, numbered one to four, one for each ward. There are only four wards."

"Can you cut out Ward one?"

"Yes, it's out now."

But the signals on the wire continued to spell F. L.

The second and third wards were tried with no better result.

"Now we will try the fourth, and if that don't kill him he is not here or has his own power and we are up a tree to locate him." Dorn and Miss Fraser suppressed their excitement and watched with bodies held rigid.

"The fourth ward now, Mr. Parsons," directed Dorn.

"We've got him!" cried the girl and Dorn together, for the signals stopped instantly.

"All right, Mr. Parsons, restore the current to Ward four."

Immediately the signals were resumed.

"Now cut it out again." And once more the wireless calls died.

"That will be all, Mr. Parsons," directed Dorn. "I'll come over and tell you about it later."

"Where is Ward four?" Miss Fraser questioned.

"It is this thinly settled section about the

station and the mill. But we won't bother the gentleman until we have learned more of him. Only remember hereafter to have the fourth ward cut out before sending or answering any wireless call. I feel wonderfully relieved now and will investigate Ward four just as soon as we get this car safely on its way." He rose and commenced to pace the office.

"The fellow, whoever he is, certainly has assurance to come into town right under our noses," stormed Miss Fraser indignantly. "He must be within a stone's throw of the mill. Why!" she exclaimed, "I believe it is — " She hesitated as if reluctant to put her thought into actual words.

"Never mind now," Dorn advised. "We'll give the skunk to the hounds, but the stage for the death scene isn't set yet. Just wait. I should talk with Mr. Malcom now, but I don't dare leave this machine without getting that fellow's message when his station answers. I wish you knew the other code."

"I do know it," she replied quickly. "I took the code home last night and worked on it until nearly morning. I can manage it while you are gone, I know."

"That's bully fine!" he praised and for a moment rested his hand in sincere appreciation upon her arm. She flushed her pleasure at his approval and turned to the instrument.

He left at once fully confident that she would be able to take his place.

Chapter Eight

AT SEVEN-TWENTY NUMBER 17 approached the lower end of Bald Eagle Canyon and warned the guard officially of her approach. When about half way past the powder mill switch in the canyon she stopped, cut in about the center at the surveyor's car intended for the soldiers, went in on the siding as ordered and got car Number 76533, Buffalo, Rochester and Beaver. Officer Starke moved his squad aboard, posted two marines on top the train, one in front and one in the rear of it.

While this was being done the Engineer Walsh was disturbed by the thought that his big Mogul would not be able to start his immense load up the canyon grade. But by the time they were coupled she was hissing from her safety valve an injunction magnified a thousand times by the canyon walls. When he gave her the vapor she let out a shout that pierced the deadly stillness of the canyon and reached the heavens. Its

shout echoed and re-echoed, as she labored with resonant protests and emerged as a blazing, furiously enraged dragon from its lair, barely able to haul its long, snake-like body from its rock retreat.

Miss Fraser nodded to Dorn who was talking to Lieutenant Pettingill. He went to the platform and as the steel leviathan slowly passed him he handed Engineer Walsh a note, asking him and his fireman to come to the station as soon as he stopped.

"Come in, Larz," he called when Larson, the conductor, appeared at the window for train orders. "Larz, this is Lieutenant Pettingill," Dorn continued, introducing the two men. "His Government orders supersede train orders over the entire division so far as your train is concerned. If at any time they conflict ask the division superintendent for instructions. He wants the car of explosives he is guarding on the end of the train between your way car and the Surveyor's car for his men."

"But," protested Larson, "we always carry that stuff in the middle of the train. I can't place it next to the caboose. What's the use shifting? It's in the middle of the train now."

The conductor evidently resented the Lieutenant's superiority.

"That's his orders, Larz, old boy, military orders, and have got to be obeyed."

Larson did not respond to Dorn's good-natured slap on his broad shoulder. Miss Fraser watched the men anxiously. To her Larson was a foreigner and his name indicated a Swede. Though she had seen him nearly every day since she came to the station she could not overcome a dislike for his stolid face. She did not understand the manifest attachment between this man and Dorn.

Engineer Pat Walsh's great bulk came through the door followed by his fireman.

"What's up now, Dorney?" he called.

"Nothing very serious, Pat. This car you got at the powder mill has a military guard, and as a further precaution the whole train crew must be sworn into the service."

"Nothing wrong to that. Go ahead and shoot!" grinned Walsh. He went to Lieutenant Pettingill who stood back of Larson and shook hands.

"It's only a military necessity, making every man responsible. A protection really," explained the Lieutenant.

"All right, line up here and Lieutenant Pettingill will administer the oath to every one at once," said Dorn. He motioned the three brakemen outside to come in together with the big engineer and the fireman. Larson made no move to get up.

"Come on, Larz, you are delaying the game," prodded Dorn good-naturedly.

But Larson sat glaring with a sullen resentment from Dorn to Pettingill.

"You say I got to be sworn into the army?"

"Yes, and hurry up, Swede, we are losing time. We ought to be rolling," broke in Walsh.

"And you say you want to put that load of stuff back next to my way-car?" he asked, ignoring Walsh. "I work for the railroad and not for the government. I don't want to be a soldier."

"You don't understand, Larz," coaxed Dorn resting his hand on his shoulder convincingly. "It is only for this trip and is done to cover one chance in a thousand that there might be trouble."

Larson shook his head like a balky mule. Miss Fraser, who was sitting at the operating table rose and turned on the light, and then resumed her seat, facing Larson.

"I'll go over the road and run my train as I always do," the conductor growled, "but I won't swear to be a soldier. I don't believe in this war," he finally blurted.

"Larz, you aren't serious, are you? I am under service oath, so is Miss Fraser."

"I meant it, and what's more I won't ride with that car next to me. I know what the damned stuff is. There is enough in that car to blow everything to hell within twenty miles. It's got to stay in the middle of the train where it is," he ended desperately.

"Larz, can it be possible," pleaded Dorn, "that you are going back on the government at a time like this?" He rested his hand more heavily on his old comrade's shoulder. He bent low to study his face. "I won't believe it. I have thought of you as my life-long friend ever since the time I went through into Malcom's River bridge and you swam into the water to drag me out. Larz, a man who would do that must have a heart big enough to serve the government that is protecting you. Tell me it isn't so, and stand up and be sworn with the rest of the boys."

Larson shook his head and looked down at the floor.

"Suppose there is some danger?" Dorn went on. "I think there is, but are you better than Lieutenant Pettingill and his men who are giving up all their time to make this world a safer place to live in? Are you better than the men who work in the factory where this necessary evil is made, or better than Miss Fraser who works within reach of it all the time? Think, man, think what you are doing! You are killing yourself with the company and your friends."

"I may be killing myself with the company or with any one else, but I'd rather live and let them that want to, have this dead hero stuff," Larson said between his teeth. Dorn's plea had made no impression whatever. The conductor's bullet shaped head seemed to shrink and settle down in his bull-like neck.

"Dorn, you are wasting your time," cut in Engineer Walsh disgustedly. "He has been a complete damn fool lately. Only tonight before we left I told him that if he didn't quit shooting off his mouth about Germany he'd get a job behind the barb-wire."

"Larz, think again," still pleaded Dorn with a real tremor in his tone. He was unwilling to give up easily a man who he believed had saved

his life and with whom he had worked many years.

"I don't care what you do," doggedly insisted the Swede, "but I'll not swear to be a soldier."

"All right, Lieutenant Pettingill," said Dorn, "I've gone as far as I can with a man who won't stand by his country. All other qualities sink into insignificance. I am through. What do you suggest?"

"First, I will administer the oath to the others and then we will consider. For the time being Larson will consider himself under arrest." Pettingill proceeded to swear in the rest of the crew.

Dorn turned to the head brakeman. "While we are waiting," he said, "shift B. R. & B. 76533 and the marines' car back to the tail-end, next to the way car. Is that all right, Pop?"

"Sure!" agreed the big engineer, as they started.

The entire crew seemed depressed by Larson's attitude, not too sure that there was not something sinister behind it.

Miss Fraser knew there was trouble ahead. She remained sitting in front of her instrument. Dorn sat near her and bent his head in his hands, suffering regret and disappointment. Lieutenant

Pettingill saw only a big Swede who showed hostility toward his country, but Dorn sensed the loss of a man who had been his friend.

The girl glanced at the clock nervously. Its hands were steadily measuring off the precious time and no one broke the tensity of the stillness.

Dorn finally raised his face from his long, powerful fingers, thrusting them through his hair in a final effort to conquer himself. Then he turned to Larson.

"Larz," he began, "are you going to disgrace yourself by being a jackal for the country's enemies? Are you going to be branded as a pacifist, a conscientious objector, which is only another name for a white-livered spineless stinking skunk, willing to muddy the water in which other men work, who ought to be put in the mines, in servitude, or to hear the crack of a rifle pointed directly to that organ which pumps his tainted, snakish blood? Pull yourself together, Larz. Be at least a part of a man before it is too late." As Dorn bent his long body to look into Larson's face his peculiar nose and entire attitude reminded Miss Fraser of a motherly eagle pleading with her recalcitrant young.

"I'm not going to die with my boots on, nor

be blown to hell, either," Larson blurted. "I can go back to the old country where they don't want to fight. Yesterday, a train crew at the other end of the division was in the way car, and a car next them exploded. They found the trucks of the car a mile away. The men went to dust. You can do what you want with me, but I won't ride next to that car."

"All right, Larz." Dorn rose definite, forceful and disgusted. "The best I can say is that it is miserable cowardice. I hope nothing worse. Miss Fraser, please call up the division superintendent."

At that moment a Marine approached Lieutenant Pettingill and saluted.

"Mr. Dorn," said the Lieutenant, "are you through with this man?" he jerked his thumb contemptuously toward the conductor.

"You have witnessed my attempt to save him. He won't let me, or perhaps he is in too deep. My duty now is plain enough." Dorn listened as Miss Fraser called the superintendent's office.

"Dawson," called Lieutenant Pettingill to the marine. "You are guarding this man. If he attempts to escape, shoot him." He then turned to Dorn. "Shall he stay here?"

"Yes, until I hear from the superintendent." Miss Fraser's hands paused and the operator at the other end of the division opened the circuit. Dorn motioned for her to give the message and he heard her tell the superintendent that Larson refused to put the car of explosives next to the way car as ordered by Lieutenant Pettingill and that he refused to take the soldier's oath. Without an instant's delay as though the information had been anticipated, came the reply.

"Ask Washington for disposition of Larson and wire what war office says. Will advise soon who is to proceed in charge of the train."

Dorn repeated the message to Lieutenant Pettingill.

"That is just what I was going to suggest. If you — " He stopped instantly at a sign from Dorn, recalling that even to the trainmen the wireless station was a secret. "Dawson," he directed, "take your prisoner to the car where you are quartered."

Larson was forced to the door with the pointed steel not more than six inches from his back. He did not have far to go. The car with its erratic load was now directly in front of the station. Miss Fraser and Dorn looked out upon

the grim spectacle. The light from where they sat focused on the scene.

Coupled to the menacing Number 76533 B. R. & B. was a car with ten men who were laughing and joking though they well knew the nature of their charge and its full possibilities. Back of them was the trainmen's way car with three brave men who faced danger and death continually calm and good-natured. In contrast was the cowering sullen prisoner who scowled his rebellion and fear.

Miss Fraser looked up at Dorn who stood by her side and he smiled into her grave eyes. Sentries on guard paced both sides of the car in front of them with rifles at a suggestive angle.

Dorn stepped back to his desk and called the powder-mill office and asked for the man in charge of the power plant.

"I have to work with the coast," he said, "and will pull on you pretty hard for a while. I am suspicious of the fourth ward as I intimated yesterday. Though it's quite dark now you can cut it out while I am working?"

"That would leave the whole ward in the dark."

"Yes, but it may not be for long. I am afraid, and it is imperative to work with Washington."

"I can connect you with Mr. Malcom's residence. I'd rather you would get his consent."

"All right, do that as quick as you can."

In a moment more Mr. Malcom was called.

"Mr. Malcom," Dorn commenced, "I don't like to disturb —"

"I'm glad you called," interrupted the manufacturer.

"The train picked up the car in the canyon," Dorn went on, "and has it here on the track now, but is delayed because the conductor refused to ride in the train next to it, or to take oath. He has been put under arrest. The superintendent requested me to ask Washington for his disposition but — "

"That's bad. Do you think there may be others involved?"

"I don't know. I hope not. But I would like to play safe. One or two things have happened lately to make me uneasy, but I do not think they have any connection with the conductor's attitude."

"I am sorry you didn't mention your suspicions, Mr. Dorn. These are unusual times. What are they?"

"I have reason to believe that there is an un-

lawful wireless station near here using your current. For that reason I have asked to have the current cut off from the fourth ward."

"Why the fourth? They would be in the dark."

"From my incomplete experiments I believe the illicit wireless is in that ward and that he does not know of our existence."

"Well, I think the people better be left without lights than without a home. The train and everything waits for that?"

"Yes. Unless we take a chance of revealing ourselves to the stranger," replied Dorn.

"Go ahead, then. I will give orders immediately. Let me know the outcome of the matter."

"Just as soon as I can get this train away I will call you, Mr. Malcom."

Miss Fraser, anticipating Dorn's wishes, went into the wireless booth and threw in the switch that gave the instrument access to almost the entire world. First she listened a moment to see if there was anything coming. As nothing was evident she began to signal Washington. Dorn dropped into a chair and commenced to write the message.

The war office soon responded, received the

message and asked her to hold the communication for answer. Their reply came in a few minutes in the form of an order to Lieutenant Pettingill.

"Deliver prisoner to marshal when you arrive Harrisburg with names of witnesses."

"When do we get to Harrisburg?" asked Lieutenant Pettingill. "Larson will have to ride in that car for awhile, after all. And if there's a plot he will be a victim, too."

"Harrisburg is on your route one hundred, or one hundred and fifty miles from here," Dorn replied. He then telephoned the power station to restore the current to ward four.

Miss Fraser went immediately to the key and called the superintendent to give him the orders from Washington.

"Is seventeen ready?" he asked.

Dorn heard the question and nodded. He wondered how he was going to supply a conductor for the train. As if in answer the superintendent's order came. As the girl transcribed it she turned to Dorn with a look of real apprehension.

"Jackson Dorn", she said aloud in reading the message, "Take the place of conductor Larson over this division, and then remain with car and

guard until tidewater destination, in authority over regular conductor."

"Well," she drew a sharp breath, "I wasn't expecting that!"

But to Dorn the message came as a relief. It meant action. As Betty saw his firm mouth set and the light flame into his eyes, her own face cleared and the color returned to her cheeks.

"After all," she said gently, "It's better for you. It gives you a chance to do more for the country. I almost envy you. I wish I could go, too."

"So do I," said Dorn, but his eyes conveyed a meaning which the girl's words had not expressed.

"And you'll see it through. I know you will," she ended firmly.

"I'll try mighty hard," promised Dorn. "I know you'll be watching."

Chapter Nine

DORN HAD TIME TO GIVE MISS Fraser only a few brief instructions before he left with the train. After he had gone she sat in the ticket office and watched the red tail light of number Seventeen grow smaller and smaller until it finally vanished around a curve. Not until then did she realize that the full burden and responsibility of two persons were upon her, and though not frightened she wondered if she would come through unscathed.

The first thing she did was to call Mr. Malcom on his private telephone to comply with his request to know results.

"That leaves you with double work until Mr. Dorn returns?" he said solicitously.

"Yes, but he will be back in two or three days. I think I can manage."

"I will send my man Whaley to you in the morning. Use him for any kind of running about you need."

"Thank you, Mr. Malcom," she replied, although she shuddered at the thought of Whaley being near her.

"I suppose you know all of Dorn's suspicions concerning an illicit radio station?" he asked.

"Yes, I called his attention to the first suspicious circumstances."

"Do you think you can protect yourself and conceal our station?"

"I think so. I shall be very careful, Mr. Malcom."

"Did Washington give you anything but bare instructions?"

"Only a word direct to Lieutenant Pettingill that a transport loaded for a port in France and carrying a large number of soldiers was out in the stream in Hampton Roads off Newport News, waiting only for this freight before sailing, and cautioned great care and every possible dispatch."

"Thank you, Miss Fraser. Call me any time for either help or advice while Mr. Dorn is away. I will have all lines running to your station inspected tomorrow, to be sure our telephone communications are not overheard, or your radio connections interfered with. We also will try to

discover where this stranger station is and what he wants here."

Miss Fraser thanked the manufacturer and turned from the telephone. She felt strangely tired and locked up the station and went home.

The next morning Whaley was at the ticket window as soon as she opened the office.

"I shall not need to bother you this morning, Mr. Whaley," she said. "If I want you I will telephone."

"Yes, certainly, just call me at the office any time," replied Whaley quickly. "How long will Mr. Dorn be away?" "I don't know." She unlocked the ticket cabinet and glanced at the red nose that appeared more hectic than usual. The hardening of her mouth informed Whaley that further sociable overtures were useless.

"Well, any time you want me, just telephone," he leered and left the station.

Later in the morning she saw Malvoney, the photographer, approaching down the track. She recalled with some misgivings the recent intimacy she had noticed between Whaley and the photographer. Malvoney entered the station and asked for a telegraph blank. While he was writing at the ticket window she took note of his

dark, heavy face, his small eyes dulled by habitual subterfuge and his long pointed nose above the thick scarlet lips.

"I am anxious to have this message, an order for supplies, rushed through," he began.

"Do you want to prepay?" she asked after counting the words.

"I will prepay," he replied and produced the sixty-five cents she named. She dropped the silver in the drawer and turned to her instrument table.

The man hesitated and for a few moments continued to consult a small note-book he held in his hand.

"Pretty tiresome work, isn't it?" he smiled pleasantly. "Don't see you down in the village much."

Miss Fraser merely smiled and continued her work at the table.

"Don't you ever have any photographs taken?" Malvoney persisted. "I believe your name is Miss Fraser. I have never been honored by you yet. I do good work and as I send messages occasionally I will be glad to favor you with a special price."

"What are your prices?" she asked, yet without interest.

"If you come I will make the charge so small, you will be surprised. In return you can favor me by hurrying my telegrams."

A quick thought came to Miss Fraser and she looked up with a more interested glance. "I go near your tent on my way home and I may drop in," she promised, wondering his order for supplies were in cipher as she had just noticed.

She was secretly glad of this opportunity to confirm suspicions that suddenly formed.

"I am there nearly all the time and I shall look for you. Can't you drop in today? It happens I have little to do and I will give you special attention."

"I'll see," she replied, then turned definitely to her instruments.

Near noontime she received a code answer to his purported order for supplies. When she started for her noon meal she decided to deliver the message herself. She felt the lure of adventure. Her arrival at his tent excited another exhibition of servility.

"I am twice delighted, Miss Fraser," he said and skilfully opened the telegram. "Glad you have honored me by bringing the message, and glad to hear that my supplies are coming." He

offered his chair and bent forward in exaggerated supplication.

"I cannot stop, Mr. Malvoney," she protested, but acknowledged his politeness by sitting on the edge of the chair.

"Can't you spare me just a minute? I have everything ready and I can get a negative or two of you in just a moment. I know you will take a beautiful picture. Won't you come in just a moment now? Then when you return this way after your luncheon I will show you the negative and perhaps a proof." He moved suggestively toward the canvas door into the space arranged for his camera.

"I really shouldn't just now," she protested, but followed him inside. In a moment more she was sitting before Malvoney's camera.

She was such a good subject he told her, and after more hollow protestations of delight he bowed her out of his tent. She went home with a distinct feeling of uneasiness and dissatisfaction and suspicion. Yet she retained such a keen impression that the man practiced duplicity that she decided to see it through. Therefore she stopped on her way back as agreed to look at the proofs.

Her rap on the wooden door brought no response. Evidently she had returned sooner than he expected. She waited a moment, then caught her breath and leaned forward against the door to listen. Through the thin board and canvass there came to her the distinct click of a wireless instrument. As if transfixed she began to follow the call and learned it was in code, but as if burned with a branding iron in her memory came the familiar letters H — S, and then the message stopped.

A louder rap on the door brought a quick scurry from within and she heard the moving of some heavy piece of furniture, evidently the shield for the wireless cabinet. Malvoney's sleek face appeared from the rear. He apologized profusely for keeping her waiting and was noticeably excited.

"I knew you would be in a hurry," he said, "and as I had a good sun I printed from each of the negatives. When you get into a mild light examine them." He handed her a large envelope. "Tomorrow you can tell me which one you like best or I will be pleased to finish all of them, for they are as I was sure they would be, magnificent pictures. They couldn't be otherwise," he flattered.

"Very well, Mr. Malvoney," smiled the girl. "I shall let you know as soon as I decide." She sensed his hurry to have her go and she was as eager to be gone. She hated herself for smiling. She sped to the station and rushed to the wireless cabinet. She threw in the switch and the instrument began its distinct story. She wrote, but as before, the message was in cipher.

Although passengers pounded on the window for tickets for an approaching train she stayed in the cabinet, her breath coming quick and deep. She felt as if she were in the presence of an impending catastrophe, or within striking distance of a venomous reptile. She secured in the cipher reference to S — H and also an evident reference to Whaley.

She went about her duties for the next half hour with weak knees and pounding heart. Her nerves were at highest tension, for at any moment either the wire or the wireless might send out their halting dots and dashes and bring to her some fearful information concerning tragedy to Dorn and his train.

Vaguely she saw the passengers moving about the station. She sold tickets and answered questions with mechanical exactness. The mid-

day passenger train arrived and departed and the station was again deserted. When the last person had gone she dropped into Dorn's chair and rested her hot face on her hands. She wanted him out there in the action. She was glad he could serve, yet something within her seemed choked and depressed. She wished him there.

But she was brought back to realities by the first stroke of the wireless receiver as the station east of her began calling for the ordnance department of the government at Washington. She waited for Washington to answer and receive the message.

She steeled herself to bear bravely whatever she might hear and went into the booth. She shut the door as if to hide from prying eyes when Washington replied "ready." Her pencil began to trace the message. The light wood was as heavy in her hand as a bar of steel, but it changed in a moment to an instrument of inspiration as the message ended.

"Harrisburg, Pa.

Ordnance Car B. R. & B. 76533 with guard was incorporated in special freight and leaving here without incident at 12.15. Prisoner Larson delivered to marshal here.

Jackson Dorn."

Chapter Ten

DORN REALIZED THAT IT WAS A signal honor to be delegated to take charge of a train in such circumstances. Though unable to distinguish signals reliably after his accident he could have the head brakeman verify those that were important. Dorn had run over the division for a long time and knew every crosstie in it.

All through the night they were given the right-of-way. The morning saw them rushing down the western branch of the Susquehanna, stopping for nothing but coal and water. At eleven-thirty they rolled into Harrisburg, where they would get a relief crew that must be sworn in as had the others.

Marines guarded Larson in regular watches during the night, but at Harrisburg a marshal came aboard with an order to take him into custody, removing him to a military prison.

"What sentence will he be likely to get?" Dorn asked of the marshal.

"If nothing more develops than appears on the surface he will be interned for the period of the war. Do you know anything of him?"

"Nothing more concerning his recent attitude. I have known him as a faithful railroad man, for a long time. He is single, with no dependents of whom I know."

"Our advice this morning from Pittsburg is that he is identified with an alliance, the principal function of which is to make trouble, a gang of foreigners by whom liberty never has been comprehended. They are all locked up this morning. It's funny how many rats come out of a hole when they get the water in, isn't it?" The marshal went into the Marines' car and reappeared with Larson. Dorn had never entered the car used by the Marines, as he did not want to see his old friend in disgrace.

"So you finished my run last night?" Larson sneered.

"The superintendent ordered it," replied Dorn. "I had no choice in the matter."

"And are you going clear through with this car?"

"Yes, I have to stay with it."

"The railroad always has used you for a good thing," taunted Larson. "And will keep on doing so till you land in hell."

"I would rather part with you without hard feelings, Larson," said Dorn. "I did all I could to save you last night, but don't start anything now."

"You needn't be sorry for me. I am going to have the best of it, for I will be out of danger. You always have been a damn fool."

"No good can come of talk like this, Larz," reminded Dorn.

"Perhaps not, but before I go I want to tell you for your own good what kind of ninny you are. After going down through that rotten bridge, with your engine, which both smashed and boiled you for a while, they kept you six months in the hospital. You signed a release without getting damages on their promise to give you a good station, and you let them land you on a job around that damned powder mill where no one else would stay. You are pulling more nuts out of the fire for them by sleeping with this cursed stuff, and if that don't get you in the end, the company will. You are welcome to all you

can get from them. I'm glad I'm through." He stopped with a snarl as the marshal took his arm and started away.

Dorn breathed a sigh of relief and shook himself erect. He now centered his interest in coupling up without shock to car B. R. & B. 76533.

Leaving Harrisburg with passenger right-of-way they made the run to Philadelphia in three hours, and by using the cut-off they were in Wilmington, Delaware, in another hour. Here they would get another engine and crew that would, by special arrangement, take them to Cape Charles two hundred miles away. They were due to arrive there early next morning.

In the Wilmington yards they were on the main track with the way car coupled to the rear and the soldiers' car in front of Number 76533, waiting for the made-up train to come from a switch preparatory to getting away.

As usual, the rear brakeman, acting as a flag man, and a soldier were posted ten car lengths in the rear, with Dorn and another soldier the same distance in front. Two Marines paced on either side, so that approach was impossible from any direction without permission.

A switch engine and crew drew near Dorn and

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the guard. The foreman said they must shift them to another track.

"You can't pass," the guard warned.

"But we have to clear the main track for a passenger train soon due."

"You can't pass," was all the reply from the Marines.

But the foreman of the train crew signaled the engineer to proceed and the engine began slowly to move toward them. The Marine, obeying orders, raised his piece, discharged it full at the foreman and then at the engineer in the cab. They then knew more fully what a military order was.

The ball pierced the cap of the foreman and missed killing him by a quarter inch. The firing brought a squad of six soldiers from their car. They placed all the men about the engine under arrest and took them to Lieutenant Pettingill at once. They were to learn that nothing must be taken for granted, and that permission must be obtained from the officer in charge to pass a military guard. And such vigilance had not been relaxed for a moment since they left Malcom's station. The strain was telling on both Dorn and Lieutenant Pettingill.

"God help you if anything happens on the way to Cape Charles!" the yardmaster said to Dorn after the train was made up and coupled to them with such care and skill that there was no perceptible jar. "I have given you eight cars of dynamite and thirty-two cars of smokeless powder and these, with the pet car you have, I think ought to keep you till you get to the Cape."

"A little more or less won't make any difference," smiled Dorn wearily. "A half dozen cases from our car will outmatch for deviltry the whole forty cars you have added."

Dorn started with the yardmaster down the row of cars to examine the brakes on every one and also the axle boxes to be sure there was none that might run hot through lack of grease.

"You will have a pipe from here to the Cape," said the yardmaster. "Only forty-one cars and not a grade as big as a mole hill. I suppose it was all right to put these eight cars of dynamite on the tail end. The brakes don't hit them so hard there."

They made their way down the length of the train to the locomotives on one end, then back to the Marines' car with 76533 between it and the way car, which was near the rear as usual.

Dorn recalled the topography of the eastern shore of Maryland and Virginia and was glad of anything that would lessen the danger, and that stood for dispatch. Another sleepless night was ahead and he recalled that it would be the third in succession. The train began to roll gently and he waved goodbye to the yardmaster.

He climbed to the top of one of the rear cars and sat down on the edge, his long legs a-dangle, facing the setting sun. The forty-one cars gathered speed after leaving Wilmington yards, the last leg of a long and important journey.

The August evening sun, though still hot, united with the gentle breeze made by the motion of the train, to caress his face and head, heavy and feverish from strain and loss of sleep. "'The world is not so bad a world as some would like to make it,'" came to him from the school books of his childhood.

Farmers with one, two and three teams in a row, going to the sidings with wagons loaded to the top with watermelons waved to him good-naturedly at crossings. Still more wagons with racks, loaded with corn on the cob bound for the various canneries for which Maryland is noted, passed and gave greeting. Dorn felt a more

normal and encouraging touch with everyday living.

He looked at the long line of cars, each seemingly possessing an individual motion of its own. One was waving gently and others wobbled while another bobbed up and down on its spiral steel springs. All seemed sensible of the great and dangerous lifting force of their burdens.

Dorn wondered if Miss Fraser heard the radio message he had sent from Harrisburg announcing to the war department "All's well!" and if she possibly could have heard the one he just had filed before leaving Wilmington. Would she be watching his progress and the wireless for the message he would file in the early morning announcing the safe arrival and the end of his dangerous mission?

His thoughts wandered and he found his head nodding. He rose and walked back to the Marines' car, messed with them, drank strong coffee and was again fit for another all night vigil, that would end at Cape Charles. From there they would go to the great channel at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, known as Hampton Roads.

Chapter Eleven

IN THE EARLY MORNING LIGHT A powerful deep-sea tug, harnessed to a fourteen-car barge with four-inch thongs of hemp, apparently rose from the sea, and with the moderation and silence of a specter, made its way into the slip where such barges connect their tracks with the switches and take on their burdens of freight in unbroken carload bulk, at Cape Charles, Virginia, about twenty-five miles over Chesapeake Bay from Newport News.

She was made fast and hard with no more play than was required by the flooding tide. The only evidence of life was the red and green signal lights which were allowed to burn, but one with a keen ear could detect the muffled hissing of steam giving hint of a full head of two hundred eighty pounds of steam in the boilers. Two men, who knew they were there at that time in the morning for a definite and solemn purpose,

were smoking and conversing in low tones in the pilot house.

Out of the darkness of the north came a long, resonant bold call from a locomotive, followed by a muffled roar that changed momentarily to more of a positive and metallic sound. Standing on top of this train of forty-one freight cars stood Dorn looking to the east with thankfulness in his heart.

Lieutenant Pettingill, his Marines, and the train crew were all equally thankful that their dangerous and valuable freight would soon be delivered to the sea.

With the precision of passenger service the road engine uncoupled and left for the round-house. A shifting engine fastened gingerly to the train hauled the thirty cars of smokeless powder to another siding for later disposition, entered the siding again, cut off the way car on the end and took on the eight cars of dynamite, the car occupied by the soldiers and last B. R. & B. 76533.

Seven of the dynamite cars were placed on one side of the waiting barge. The remaining car of dynamite, the Marines' car and the B. R. & B. went on the other track midway of the barge,

then the lighter and its dreadful burden of possibilities with scarcely a sound left the slip and seemed dissolved in the silent waters of the Chesapeake.

"Well, Dorn," said Lieutenant Pettingill, "I thank God it is over at last! Now, it's up to the pilot."

"Yes, Lieutenant," agreed Dorn. "I am beginning to feel the relaxation from the strain, and after we get this stuff signed for I am going to eat breakfast and go to bed. I feel now that I could just sit and do nothing for a whole week." Dorn stretched himself and began to sip some coffee the Marines had prepared in their car.

"You do well to relax. This damned trip will be on me like a nightmare for a day or so. I believe if we'd had another day of this my men would have gone to pieces. It's not the idea of being killed that unnerves them, but it is the sensation that a man can do nothing to help himself. In battle a fellow gets something of a run for the chances he takes."

"You're right," agreed Dorn. "A man can stand most anything that is positive, but the indefinite leaves so much to the imagination that it becomes torture." He wondered if he looked

the need of a barber, clean linen and a shave as wretchedly as did Lieutenant Pettingill.

"Do you know," said the Lieutenant suddenly, "I feel as if I had known you all my life. It's always so when men work together with common purpose in times of uncertainty and danger."

"You have expressed my own feelings, Lieutenant. I have felt more than surface friendship and shall hope to hear from you occasionally."

"Well, if you stick to your friends as you did to that Swede, your friendship is the genuine sort which I shall prize greatly," warmly rejoined Pettingill. He turned from Dorn to view from the window the sunrise now well defined and lifting gloriously from the midst of the Atlantic.

"I don't wish Larson any bad luck," said Dorn. "But he seems to richly deserve anything he will receive."

"The trouble is deeper than appears on the surface, Dorn. Sweden, either in self defense, or by reason of sympathy, seems universally pro-German."

Dorn nodded and looked thoughtful, then feeling the barge lose headway he leaned out of the open window.

"Here we are now," he said. "I think this is the transport into which we discharge."

"I suppose we'll have to take our papers to the purser to get a release signed," said the Lieutenant.

"Yes, when he signs for the cargo, which he will do as soon as he breaks bulk and checks up for the quantity, you and I are through, thank God!"

Dorn and Pettingill mounted the companion-way lowered to them at once and were met at the gangway by Captain Browning, the navigator, and Purser Peake of the transport "Tartar."

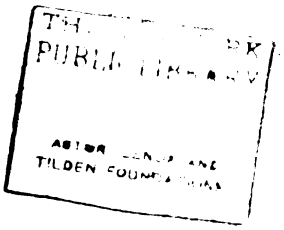
"Come into my room, gentlemen," cordially invited Captain Browning, leading the way to his spacious cabin. "I heard by wireless that you had arrived at the Cape, and left there over an hour ago. Been looking for you hard enough, as this is the third day we have been washed by Chesapeake water since they decided to hold us for your cargo. Now let's see," he continued, "you are Mr. Dorn, representing the railroad company and have receipts for us to sign." He moved toward his flat desk and motioned Dorn and Pettingill to be seated.

Dorn nodded and produced a large envelope with papers.

"Well, Mr. Peake," said Captain Browning,



"This car we have just opened is empty."


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"suppose you take a copy of their bills and with First Officer White break the seals, check up the freight we are to take, and then we will sign for it." The purser took the copy of Dorn's way bill and departed hurriedly, as minutes counted now.

"I suppose you have had a long hard rail trip, gentlemen, likely without much sleep. After we attend to business I will have you .o breakfast with me while they are transferring this peevish leviathan you have been nursing."

"Thank you, Captain," replied Dorn. "I think both Lieutenant Pettingill and I will appreciate a change in food." As Dorn glanced around he heard through the open door the reassuring sound of the well charged wireless instruments. In a few moments the purser returned evidently greatly excited.

"What is it, Mr. Peake?" asked Captain Browning.

"There seems to be some mistake. This car we have just opened is empty!" He spoke laboriously, trying to suppress his excitement.

"You must have opened the wrong car," laughed Lieutenant Pettingill looking incredulously at Dorn. "Don't spring anything like

that on us or you will cause us to have heart failure. We saw our car loaded and it has hardly been out of our sight since, and when we were not there we had from two to four Marines on it."

Dorn shoved his chair so he could get a good view of the purser who stood by the captain's door. "Sure, you have the wrong car," he smiled, although he squirmed uneasily. "If you ask Officer Starke you can be sure of the position. As Lieutenant Pettingill says, do not condemn us to death by even intimating that car is empty. Of the other eight cars of dynamite I am not so sure, as we had nothing to do with them, but this car you say is empty has one thousand nine hundred and sixty cases of Stag Brand, S. H."

"Oh," hesitated the purser, "I must be wrong, of course. I will look again and get the right one this time sure." He turned on his heel and left the room briskly.

"What a row it would start if anything like that was to happen," said Lieutenant Pettingill. He looked from Captain Browning to Dorn with a suddenly pale face.

"It would be me for the sharks," shivered Dorn. He looked haggard and rueful with his growth of beard and untidy linen.

"He has likely got the numbers confused," comforted Captain Browning trying to speak easily, but he looked tensely anxious when the purser entered, followed by First Officer White and Officer Starke.

"Captain Browning," said the purser, "I had the right car, the only B. R. & B. 76533 on the barge. I have broken the seals and have examined it thoroughly. And as First Officer White and the Marine here also saw, the car is completely empty!"

Dorn's long body shot erect as a powerful steel spring relieved from tension. He led the way without words to the companionway. Lieutenant Pettingill followed quickly with Captain Browning and the rest. Every one was shocked and tensely alert.

Dorn darted down the adjustable stairway that rested on the barge and with a few reckless steps was before the side door of the car. For the thousandth time he stopped to read on its freshly painted side the words Buffalo, Rochester and Beaver and the number 76533. He knew this was the car.

"Here is the seal I just took off," said the purser.

Dorn slowly took the metal straps on which

was the lead ball that fastened the ends together, making a perfect seal, and looked for the number embossed on the lead. There was the number of Malcom's station, seventy-nine. There could be no possible mistake, for here was the seal he had pressed on the lock in the presence of Griggs and Lieutenant Pettingill, and which had been photographed by Whaley. Then, with the litheness of desperation, he threw the door open, but instead of the felt cushion that Griggs had so carefully fitted to the door space he found only the bare, mocking floor.

Without a word, as though the action meant life or death, Dorn placed his hands on the floor of the car and vaulted into it as a stag hound, oblivious to everything but his lead. He walked rapidly from one dark end to the other, and returned to the door slowly, dropped his long legs outside and sat on the floor facing all those who now appeared to him as his accusers. He realized with a pang that seemed to part his heart his responsibility to the railroad, the Government, to the cause of freedom, to his own conscience. With his elbows on his knees and with his face bent in his long, powerful hands he sat motionless with eyes closed.

"Lieutenant Pettingill," he said in a voice hoarse with self-condemnation and weary terror, "we have been tricked and sold."

Captain Browning had not been given command of a great transport by accident. He was a great man and knew at once there was no acting. He recognized the grave culmination in the lives of two men, recognized the responsibility to them and the Government.

"Gentlemen," he said firmly, breaking the stillness that followed Dorn's outburst, "come to my quarters where we will talk it over."

Chapter Twelve

EVERY ONE WHO HAS LIVED KNOWS what it is to have the hand of hell upon his heart, gripping it to the point of suffocation. Dorn experienced this touch of hell when he realized the full significance of the situation facing him.

Lieutenant Pettingill, mercifully less sensitive and upheld by a practical philosophy, was for the time stronger than Dorn. He was moved by the apparent collapse of the man he had learned to admire. He took Dorn gently by the arm, and helped him from his seat in the car doorway, to the deck of the barge. From there Dorn was guided by him up the companionway to the deck of the "Tartar" and forward to Captain Browning's capacious stateroom as a criminal going to execution.

"Lieutenant Pettingill and Mr. Dorn," said Captain Browning taking a chair at his desk, "what you have been through during the last

three days is apparent to me, and this unfortunate ending calls for sober judgment and the best we have in us. You have had no breakfast, neither have I. It will be served here in my room. That will give us a chance both to brace ourselves and to collect our wits." He telephoned his order to the galley and then excused himself as he entered the adjoining wireless room.

"Dorn," said Lieutenant Pettingill, "there is a big conspiracy working against us. More caution could not possibly have been exercised by living souls."

Dorn turned his head wearily toward Lieutenant Pettingill. His nose and close cropped ears appeared more prominent against his pale unshaven face.

"Other folks are not going to see it so leniently, Lieutenant Pettingill," he reminded. His voice was labored and hoarse. "I have been an unlucky devil ever since I was born. From childhood in the clay-washed mountains of West Virginia my ambition has led me into one pitfall after another. But, damn it!" he ended savagely, "I'm not through yet!"

"Of course you're not through," encouraged the Lieutenant heartily.

"Yet," groaned Dorn, "I seem to be possessed by devils in everything I undertake. I came to the railroad and began firing, and several times escaped death only by a hair. Then as soon as they gave me an engine the cursed genie had its hand on the throttle with me, and now, I am cursed again." Dorn broke off in miserable futility.

"Dorn, that is just weakness. It's just useless self-pity, and in a few moments you will wonder that you have spoken thus. You daily walk hand in hand with death. Your courage far exceeds mine, and I know I am not a coward. Why, man, pull yourself together. Stop this, I say! Your country needs brave men, not whiners. Besides you have the heart of a lion. You cannot be condemned for something you have not done."

At this point they were interrupted by the cabin boy who entered with a tray of food. Captain Browning joined them from the wireless room and Pettingill wondered if they had overheard their talk.

"Gentlemen," Browning invited cordially, "sit up to the table. You both look as if a little stimulant would not harm you after your trying period."

Dorn rose with an effort, as a man three times his age, at first unable to straighten his long, thin body.

"I suppose the first thing to do is to inform Washington of this matter," said Captain Browning, "so that they can get in action. I am in a bad fix just now about that. I gave one operator shore leave until ten this morning and the man who should be on duty has just been injured. I will have to send ashore for an operator. Washington undoubtedly heard the radio from Cape Charles notifying me that you had arrived with the cargo. They will soon expect a report that both the dynamite and S. H. are alongside the 'Tartar' and being transferred."

"I am an operator and will send your message," replied Dorn instantly, shoving back from the table, ready to go into action again.

"Is that so? Good! But not another thing until after breakfast." Captain Browning admired the fire that came into Dorn's smarting eyes at the first call to duty, and the kindling of the dinted haggard face.

The cabin boy placed before them ham and eggs, coffee and hot bread in ample quantities and of reviving savor.

Dorn ate in silence yet listened keenly to the captain's story. Pettingill took pains as he told Browning of the entire journey to stress the care and precaution used by Dorn all along the line, from the first moment of loading to the last delivery.

"It's the Hun's work without doubt," decided Browning.

"Have you prepared your message for Washington?" Dorn asked as he rose and pushed back his chair. "And you will wish to send one, too, won't you?" he added turning to Pettingill.

"Yes, I will have mine ready by the time you get Captain Browning's off," replied Pettingill rising and following the others into the wireless room adjoining.

"Do you know how your operator was injured this morning?" asked Dorn as he went to the instruments and threw in the switch connecting them with the ship's generator.

"No," said the captain thoughtfully, "I don't. Got a severe shock somehow. We have tremendous power, but never have had such an accident before."

Dorn was wondering if there could be any

connection between the fact that one operator asked for shore leave and that the other had been injured. "It looks all right," he said mechanically, and then shifted his thoughts to the work in hand. Mechanically he opened the key and began calling S — H, his private call for Malcom's to test the break on the instrument. He noticed that it was half past eight o'clock. He had only twice issued that call when like the instant response of a guardian angel there came as clear as the ring of steel, a reply that could issue but from one station. The touch of Betty Fraser undoubtedly was on the key. She had replied instantly and Dorn knew she had been waiting faithfully for his signal. It was a private call and had no significance to any official operator. Dorn fully interpreted her reply. "Malcom station answers. What do you want?" He felt almost as if his body were the powerful current that enabled him to signal his mountain station five or six hundred miles away, so deep was his thrill at the sense of her nearness. He felt as if a comforting and reassuring hand had rolled the film of fear, self-depreciation and self-pity from his eyes and bade him see the wonders of a beautiful morning, and look at the world as it

was, as he had seen it the night before in the glories of a closing day while he rolled hopefully to his destination.

Both Captain Browning and Lieutenant Pettingill wondered at the instant change as Dorn stiffened in his chair. The fire of an eagle's eyes came over the bridge of his great nose like two rifles pointed at them. And as he looked an interrogation to them he replied to S—H. "Stay cut in and stand by."

"The instrument appears all right. I can see nothing wrong," he said to Captain Browning. "Shall I signal Washington?"

"Yes, get them as soon as you can. I wrote my message before breakfast." Captain Browning handed him a message written in the cipher of the navy.

As Dorn was sending the two messages carefully prepared by Lieutenant Pettingill and Captain Browning he felt as if he were pronouncing his own sentence, but with faith that a square deal would finally triumph now, he was firm, and his touch on the instrument was unfaltering. He knew that his radius was at least two thousand miles and also that as soon as his call was sent out on the morning air for Washington that

every radio operator within that immense sweep was at attention and compelled to register.

"I can well imagine how it will flatten them out at Washington," commented Lieutenant Pettingill. "It makes me feel that if spies can do that, they could accomplish almost anything." He was watching Dorn who was alertly waiting for the next stroke on his receiver.

"I can't comprehend it yet. I can't realize that it actually has happened," Dorn cut in savagely. "I still visualize my trip with this car as an actual certainty that it was not tampered with. It is impossible. Why, there seems the uncanniness of the supernatural. The cleverest legerdemain multiplied a thousand times in cunning could not remove fifty tons of freight, guarded by two seasoned Marines with loaded rifles."

"And the worst phase of it is," said Captain Browning, "that they need this stuff on the other side badly, or I would not have been held here with five thousand soldiers and a full cargo of supplies. It seems strange that Washington doesn't reply quickly. Wouldn't you think they'd ask some questions?" He stroked his long beard anxiously and glanced at Dorn who sat

as a statue resting his head in his hand, seemingly boring holes where he gazed at the polished table.

"But even worse than all that," said Lieutenant Pettingill, "is the devilish power of this explosive. The full import of this you cannot understand until you have seen as I have the unusual precautions under which it is made. It is called an explosive, but that don't convey an adequate idea of it. It possesses in a drop as big as a pea all the lifting powers and devilishness of the hells that have existed for a million years. This manufactured devilism has been stolen, diverted or lost. In any case it is loose, and I believe it is in the hands of the bandit criminal Hun who makes Beelzebub or Lucifer appear like a wrist watch sissy slacker. One little case of fifty pounds would scatter to dust all the gold of the treasury at Washington, with the war, state and navy thrown in."

As Pettingill finished speaking Captain Browning stirred uneasily and watched the unresponsive instrument. "But why don't they say something?" he fumed impatiently.

"I think you underestimate the time it will take to have the message translated and placed

in the hands of the responsible heads," replied Lieutenant Pettingill, looking at Dorn who assented with a nod. In his mind's eye Dorn could see every operator or clerk at every radio station feverishly going over his book to put the words into readable shape.

At last the stroke for which Dorn was waiting came as a savage dog snapping at his chain. The response was so powerful and assertive that he knew it was from a radio fully as powerful as the "Tartar's." The message, which was signed by one in high authority whose name cannot be divulged, was as follows:

"Washington advice intercepted on board the 'Mayflower.' Steaming toward you. Hold everything intact until I arrive."

When Dorn finished writing he tore the paper from the pad and handed it to Captain Browning, giving no hint of its import, and then resumed his watch of the instrument.

"Great Heavens! what a piece of luck! I had something of a hint that he might come down here before we got away," exclaimed Captain Browning, handing the message to Pettingill.

"Yes, I am glad," said Pettingill, "his advent here will dispose without red tape in a half an

hour, more than an inquiry would accomplish in a year. Eh, Dorn? Didn't I tell you something would come out of the sky to save our faces?" He went to Dorn's side and grasped his shoulder affectionately.

Chapter Thirteen

"HOW FAR AWAY IS THE 'MAYflower?'" asked Captain Browning.

"Hard to guess," Dorn replied, "but I judge very close. Only a few miles."

"I will have a boat lowered to go out to it," Captain Browning said and left the room, followed by Lieutenant Pettingill, to issue his orders.

Left alone, Dorn walked to the open window. His eyes smarted and ached for sleep, but that was of minor importance now. The "Tartar" was swinging on her chain with the tide, bringing his view to the northward. He could see coming toward them a lead gray vessel without name or flag. The next moment it swung about to anchor near them and even before the hook went into the mud a gig was leaving it and making directly toward them.

Waiting in suspense Dorn remained in the wireless room. Washington knew that the right

man had immediately taken the reins and they waited for a decision. How would that decision affect Dorn? Did it mean disgrace, even prison?

His period of wretched waiting was broken when Captain Browning appeared at the door and motioned him to enter the stateroom where the conference was being held.

Dorn was introduced to a clear eyed, strong faced man of powerful physique. This official motioned him to a chair near by.

"Mr. Dorn," he began, "we have received a verbal account of the loading and attempted transportation of the car which, as established by the photographs taken after loading and sealing, was brought to this point under strict military escort. I have heard that its contents have been removed in a manner entirely a mystery, but which could not have been accomplished without the aid of persons having a knowledge of this transaction. Is that the case as you understand it, representing the railroad?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any theory as to the motive for the removal?" continued the official, taking a careful measure of the haggard and weary Dorn.

"Three days of constant watchfulness and

nights without sleep, added to the shock of this discovery, have left me almost without power to reason," replied Dorn. "I need time to think."

"Have you formed any impression of possible motive that might aid us in the solution of this problem?"

"This explosive's value as a medium of destruction in the hands of the enemy gives us cause for reasonable suspicion," said Dorn slowly, "yet the intrinsic value is great, and might tempt a criminal to take chances."

"You are a licensed wireless operator, as well as the station agent of the railroad? Also owing to the rebellion of the regular conductor you were placed in charge absolutely over the first division and as a supernumerary with authority over all conductors during the entire trip here?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dorn promptly. He felt that even though the evidence seemed piling up against him, both Captain Browning and Lieutenant Pettingill were on his side.

"Am I right in my conclusion," went on the official, "that you and Lieutenant Pettingill both checked up and verified the contents of this car, and that they were then sealed in the presence of at least two employees of the shipper?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that immediately afterward Lieutenant Pettingill's squad arrived and an armed guard was posted on that car, which has remained there up to this moment?"

"Well — I know that within a half hour after the loading and sealing the car, the train bringing the guard arrived, and that I heard Lieutenant Pettingill instruct his officer Starke to post the guard on it. I have no doubt that it was done."

"In addition to that, this factory, as well as the switch on which this car was loaded, is in a deep canyon, and can be reached only through the office of the factory, and the two entrances of Bald Eagle Canyon, which are protected by an armed guard, as well as a mounted patrol above?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dorn with the same positive candor.

"Mr. Dorn, you are not under oath, nor is this an inquisition, but I don't want you to give information you may at any time be sorry for. For that reason you may refuse, if you wish, to answer any more personal questions."

Dorn flushed. The significance of the official's words became only too apparent. "I know of

nothing that I wish to withhold under any circumstances," came from Dorn like a shot.

"I felt that way, yet wished to warn you. Now, as I understand it you have been on the road some time and were a locomotive engineer and are now in good standing with the Brotherhood?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you believe that this conductor Larson's attitude is significant, beyond his personal feelings?"

"No."

"Are you equally sure of Malcom, the powder manufacturer?"

"Yes, sir," came from Dorn without a moment's hesitation.

"Have you reason to suspect any of his employees?"

Dorn hesitated. There flashed across his mind the weak inefficiency of Whaley, but his slight suspicions would seem ridiculous in this grave crisis. His answer was an evasion, however. He suddenly wanted to carry through his investigations his own way though at this time he knew nothing positive about Malvoney's wireless instrument as did Miss Fraser.

"All of Malcom's employees are simple mountain people," he replied. "They take pride in their blood origin and their hazardous employment. They resent the intrusion of outsiders and worship Malcom as their acknowledged head. To point to any one actually disloyal would be difficult."

"Have you any information however slightly bearing on this matter that might lead to the discovery of this great crime?"

"I have none now I feel worthy of repetition to you. In my present state of mind I might do irreparable harm by mentioning mere impressions."

"But you realize that in the face of all these undoubted facts there is negligence, and a weak place somewhere, that has made possible a crime punishable with death?"

"I do realize it, and will aid in every possible way to unearth the culprit," answered Dorn gravely.

"That's all, Mr. Dorn," the official said in dismissal. Dorn returned to the wireless in a dizzy, conflicting state of mind, wholly without power to analyze the course events were taking. Apparently they did not intend to hold him

under suspicion; he was watched, undoubtedly, but had received reasonable consideration. He did not care if they did watch every move. This did not lessen his own sense of heavy responsibility and defeat. Some one had tricked him because of lacking alertness. He had in some unaccountable way failed in a trust. This was the unbearable thought. Was he a dead one? and the Hun so much more astute and cunning! His jaws fairly snapped at the thought.

In a short time the wireless operator whose shore leave had expired came to relieve him. Dorn looked around the transport for Lieutenant Pettingill, but his friend was not within sight. The ship appeared more crowded than ever with soldiers and every one seemed excited and alert. Dorn walked slowly along the crowded deck to the companionway and down to the barge. Each door of all the cars was wide open and every car was empty. The contents had been swallowed up by the great ship to which the barge still was lashed. The converted passenger car used by the soldiers was still there though deserted, and next to it was the hideous nightmare whose name and number were stencilled as with red hot letters on Dorn's memory.

As he came from the Marines' car he met Officer Starke.

"Well, Mr. Dorn," the officer greeted, "the Hun has put one over us in spite of all our finesse."

Dorn flushed, but made no retort. "Where is Lieutenant Pettingill?" he asked.

"He's busy on board. We didn't know it till just now that we must stay on board and go to the Azores for war zone duty. This war game makes sudden changes in plans and we don't always have time to say goodbye. The Lieutenant's been looking for you, though."

"How soon do you sail?"

"There goes the first line now. We'll be under way in one minute more. Goodbye," cried he, running to the companionway just before it was hauled up loosing the ship from the barge.

The great ocean tug, still lashed to the barge, evidenced signs of activity. There was a clang in her engine room, and yeasty water began foaming about her powerful propeller. When Dorn looked again at the immense ship crowded with soldiers its anchor was coming out of the bay and she with great majesty and power was heading toward the Battle Field, preceded by

the two fretful and swift pilot convoys who beckoned her on to the open sea.

On deck Dorn finally discerned Lieutenant Pettingill hastening to the rail. He knew that in kindness his friend had wished to wave goodbye. A lump rose in Dorn's throat. He felt a sense of desertion and loneliness. He must go back to the mountains, without open censure it was true, yet without praise, disgraced in his own sight, and a failure before men. He wished that he could have gripped the Lieutenant's hand in parting, yet he realized that stern duty must come ahead of the finer considerations of friendship. The Lieutenant would have come to him if he could. So Dorn tried to find comfort in this, and watched the great ship, until the men on her decks became mere dots in the distance.

With bent head he walked slowly along the deck of the barge now moving back rapidly to Cape Charles. No one had even intimated that he was culpable, yet they could not hold him blameless. He was in it. He was left to go his way, but he felt that men must look at him askance. Even definite blame or punishment would have been more bearable. His railroad superiors were venturing no new orders, were

asking no questions, and evidenced a disturbing lack of interest in him.

His thoughts turned to Betty Fraser. She had answered his call on the wireless. He had asked her to stand by. With the cipher in her possession she now must know the substance of the messages to Washington. Perhaps at this moment he stood to her as a failure, too, maybe even worse, a traitor. Yet even as his mind formed the word he felt again the unseen soothing hand and strength came back. After all, he had his freedom and with twenty-four hours' sleep he would be in perfectly fit condition to work out his own salvation. He was squarely thrown on his mettle. That was some advantage. Time and prodigious effort he felt capable of must bring the answer: that would clear him.

He went again to look at the cursed car. As he passed it his hands clenched and his teeth set. He stood before it with a new, more personal interest. They evidently intended to let him alone; they thought he, unhampered, would help himself, and the Government; he was grateful for the privilege.

With the sudden tensity of a new thought he bent closer and studied the number on the trucks,

the foundry number and the chalk marks still remaining. He made careful records in his pocket note-book, then walked to the other side of the car and continued his minute study.

He, stood before the car a long time as the barge splashed through the bay, as if he would wring from the fabrication of steel the secret of how an astute manufacturer, an entire railroad with an unfailing system, the Government and a part of the United States Service could have been outwitted, cheated and flaunted, and how he — miserable he — the partial instrument of each, had been spit on as a numskull, and by whom?

Chapter Fourteen

DORN WENT ASHORE IMMEDIately Cape Charles was reached to inquire about the first train to Philadelphia. He felt that his movements were noted. But he found satisfaction in the thought that he could stand watching. He had nothing to conceal. He might have been a fool; a dupe but not more. He found he had a little over two hours to wait. He would have time for a bath, a shave, some new linen and a square meal. Once on board the train towards the mountains he would sleep if he had to stand up.

Bathed, clean shaven and again fed, Dorn went early to the train that was made up there, threw two seats together in the smoking car, folded his long legs into a letter S and using his arms for a pillow he entered the deep mysteries of sleep. Thus insensible as though dead he remained until he reached Philadelphia eight hours

later. Here, only half awake, he changed trains and relapsed into complete unconsciousness while animated steel took him steadily during the long night back to his mountain home.

Before sunrise the next morning when the long passenger train paused at Malcom's Station as if to take a long bracing breath before entering the gloom of Bald Eagle Canyon, Dorn left the train. He filled his lungs with the pure bracing mountain air as he watched the lights disappear around the granite walls into the canyon. He was still free: delighted though fierce for achieving his vindication and bagging the criminals.

With new virile vigor that he had acquired from sleep he felt that he could overcome prodigious obstacles. His jaws set hard as he slipped his key into the door and entered the station, two hours before Miss Fraser was due.

He noticed first the perfect order of the office and then saw on the instrument table the same tomato can filled with wild flowers. They were still fragrant and with the fragrance came a sense of Betty's nearness.

He went to the wireless cabinet, opened the door, and reached inside to turn on the light.

Before him on the stool, her head resting on her arms, unconscious in sleep, sat Betty Fraser. He was about to reach out his hand; then, sensing the possible shock to her if wakened thus suddenly and by him, he closed the door gently and returned to the telegraph instrument. He threw in the switch that opened the wires over the line, hoping the click of the instruments would bring her gradually back from sleep.

As he expected, the heavy hammering on the highly charged wire awakened the girl and she came slowly from the cabinet, rubbing her eyes as she walked toward him. She stared at him for a breathless moment, then checked a delighted relieved cry.

"Well," she substituted more calmly, "I thought you'd be on this train, but I did not intend to sleep." She wet her handkerchief from the small water pitcher and bathed her eyes.

He leaned across the instrument table and eagerly scanned her face. "You know all that has happened?" he asked.

"I know that the car arrived empty, and I guessed that you would be home on this train." Her manner seemed guarded and a bit strained.

She leaned her elbow on the letter press and did not meet his eyes.

Dorn felt a sudden sense of returning weakness and depression, as if his strength was being wrung from him by her apparent indifference.

"And you think that I —"

She checked him with the lifting of her hand.

"I am so dazed I don't know what to think," she said. Her voice was low and strained.

"How does Mr. Malcom feel about it?" he asked, watching her carefully.

"At first he became nearly insane, but is calmer now. He does not blame you — yet." She ended with a significant pause.

"Has anything happened? Is there anything new to work on here? Has any evidence shown up?"

"Small things have happened, but the mystery is still as great. We have been tricked and outwitted on our own ground, at our own game."

"How far am I to blame, Betty? What have I failed to do?" There was a tinge of helplessness in his tone, almost boyishness.

She looked at him steadily, but made no reply. Dorn straightened and looked away. He could not believe that doubt rested back of the

seriousness of her eyes, yet he did not seem to be receiving from her the comfort and help he had expected.

"What theory does Mr. Malcom advance?"

"He has none. He says his manifold duties prevent him from making specialized analysis of the situation. That it is work for a strong man with daring and initiative."

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"I felt more like being here," she evaded. "I was too excited to sleep at home."

"Has anything happened to help you locate the illicit wireless plant?"

"Well, Malvoney, the tent photographer, has a wireless instrument." She then proceeded to tell him briefly all the circumstances of her discovery.

"What do the trainmen think of Larson?"

"They think him a rat and a fool, but not connected with this plot." Then she scanned him closely. "How much sleep have *you* had since you left here?"

"I slept all the way home. I am rested now."

"Go get your breakfast. I will stay until you come back. I think it unwise to leave this station one minute alone until — "

"Until what?" he asked with softened tone, wondering what there was about her wavy brown hair and honest forehead that attracted him more than usual.

"Until these human snakes are dragged from hiding and destroyed," she replied.

"Wouldn't you rather go now and get your breakfast first, — I — "

"I cannot get my breakfast for almost two hours. You go now and return by that time."

He moved to the door, then hesitated. "Betty," he said, looking back, "are those cars on the powder-mill switch? I mean the same cars that were stored there the day this hoodoo car was set in for loading?"

"No, I got an order for Number 18 to take them west last night." She looked at him, puzzled by his tensity. "A record would be made when the cars went into the Pittsburg yard, wouldn't it?" she added.

"Yes."

"But what good will they do you?"

"Perhaps none, but I have an idea, that's all."

"Last night," she said, "Mr. Malcom went over the matter by telephone. He found that

there were about twenty minutes elapsed between the act of sealing the car and the arrival of the Marines,—too short a time for any manipulation. He insists that fifty tons of that kind of freight could not be spirited from one car to another in that length of time, or be manhandled in any way whatever. For that reason he insists that the contents must certainly have been lost in transit."

"Which," cut in Dorn, "puts the yoke squarely on my neck."

"Don't the Marine Guard assume some part of the responsibility?"

"I see little use in trying to locate the blame now. What every one wants to know first is where the mighty explosive is, that immense incomprehensible damage may not be done."

Dorn slowly closed the door behind him and started for his room and breakfast. He was depressed again by Betty's strange aloofness, but after a bath and a good meal he felt a return of his fighting spirit.

When he arrived at the station again he saw Malvoney leaving the door. He passed close to the man and nodded curtly. His ten fingers instinctively longed to clasp the throat of the

sleek photographer whom he believed to be his enemy. When he entered the station there was a dangerous gleam over his hooked nose and his muscles twitched in anticipation.

"A customer so early in the morning?" he asked Miss Fraser as he tossed his hat on its hook.

"Yes, he left a telegram to be sent rush, but the station for New York doesn't open for fifteen minutes." She reached for her hat and moved toward the door.

"Are you positive you heard a wireless instrument in his tent?"

"I am positive."

"What do you think of him?"

"I think he is an unusually good photographer, yet does not fit his business. His wireless may be only a fad."

She cut off further questions by leaving the office. Something in the girl's attitude puzzled and troubled Dorn. Her old frankness seemed to be held in leash.

As soon as he could get the station he sent Malvoney's message. Just before the morning local train from the east arrived he was interested to see Malvoney and Whaley talking ear-

nestly together on the station platform. Malvoney evidently intended to take the train. Dorn noted his unusually expensive bag. After Whaley saw Malvoney on board the local he stepped to the ticket window.

"What kind of a trip did you have, Mr. Dorn?" he leered.

"Hello Whaley," Dorn greeted, but made no reply.

"There's hell to pay down in the 'hole,'" Whaley went on. "The old man is driving every one crazy to get out more of the stuff, and my Lord what a temper he has on him these last few days! Can't hardly live with him, though he's quieted down some now. He's about nutty to get another shipment of Sky High off. Must be good demand for that stuff."

Dorn looked into the small red-rimmed eyes steadily. They shifted under his glance.

"We want three cars today," Whaley went on. "Two for powder and one for dynamite. But the old man's crazy about Sky High. I suppose when another car is ready there will be more Marines to feed barbecued pig?"

Dorn knew that the man had been drinking, and he looked down into his craven soul through

unguarded windows. Had Whaley been sober he would not have twitted Dorn so boldly of his failure.

"I will see that you get the cars today," Dorn said shortly, and turned from the window to end the interview.

"All right, I'll report that you'll have the three cars on Bald Eagle siding soon," said Whaley as he torpidly moved away.

Dorn could not reconcile the apparent cunning and artifice of Malvoney with the fact that he would lean on such a rotten support as Whaley. But possibly he was the only yellow material at hand.

In a short time Miss Fraser returned, refreshed by her breakfast and brief rest. She took her place at Dorn's desk without words. For a time they worked in silence. Now and then Dorn turned to watch the serious lines of her profile.

Finally she looked up sharply. "Do you know," she said, "I am beginning to believe this man Malvoney has been using Whaley?"

"Why?" he asked quickly.

"Just now I saw Whaley go into the photographer's tent. He had a key and seemed familiar with the place."

She rose suddenly and came to his side. For the first time since his return she threw off restraint. "Oh!" she cried out passionately, "I wish I were a man. There's a big man's work to do here. You can do it if you will. You aren't going to just — to just sit there, are you?" She was excited and a bit exasperated.

Dorn's eyes met hers steadily and he smiled. "No, Betty, I am not going to just 'sit here.' Not one minute longer than I must. I am going to count on you, too, not as a man, but as a woman, with all a woman's instincts and wit. You do not need to be a man to help in this."

"But you must be doubly a man," she spurred. "Don't you see how it looks for you, for us, unless you solve this thing? Think of the service you can do the country, the whole world! Think of the cloud hanging over the railroad men, the most loyal band of men in the country! Do you realize the power you have, the privilege?" Her cheeks were flaming, and under the lash of her stimulating challenge his eyes flashed again to hers.

"I do realize, Betty, and I am going through to the last notch for our country and for our honor, and I need your help."

"You'll have all I can give to the last ounce of my strength. Why, it means more to me than anything else ever has meant."

"What means more, Betty, just what?"

"All of it. Our privilege to help, your honor, your fight, your victory."

"That was what I needed to have you say, Betty. Now I can fight, as you say, with the strength of two men. We are fighting the Hun. The battle here is more important than the one in Flanders."

"But," she cut in with a woman's swift fear, "you will be careful?"

"Shall I pussy-foot?" he jerked out. "No, caution will not win this fight. Every American, every soul on earth who loves justice, must forget carefulness of self and destroy this hellish menace that now threatens."

Betty bent her head. "I was wrong to speak of carefulness," she said gently.

"We are dealing with the dogs of Hell united with the cunning of the serpent," he went on. "One must get the steel and the other the heel, and I am going to do my share. If I come out with a whole skin, all right; if I do not I shall have my own approval, and I hope — yours."

He went slowly out of the station, leaving the girl white and shaken at the tempest she had roused.

He went directly to Malvoney's tent. The door was closed but unlocked. He entered without knocking. He heard no sound at first, but later could detect heavy breathing beyond the thin partition. He entered the second room and found Whaley stretched unconscious on the settee in a drunken stupor.

Chapter Fifteen

DORN SHOOK WHALEY WITHOUT results. Swiftly and in silence he proceeded to examine thoroughly the interior of the tent. He found plenty of evidence that connections for a wireless instrument had been made, but the apparatus itself had been removed. Further careful search also failed to reveal any of Malvoney's personal belongings. Only the camera and photographer's equipment remained. Evidently that had served its purpose, like the wireless, and was abandoned or destroyed.

Dorn kicked aside the debris in the dark room and among other things revealed a bundle of films. On examination he recognized these as some cars Malvoney had developed for the lazy Whaley for Malcom's bills of lading. He slipped these into his pocket for more careful investigation and continued his search. Finding nothing more he left Whaley unconscious, with the

bluebottle flies buzzing about his purple face, and returned to the station.

He entered the station briskly and found Miss Fraser at her post.

"Whaley is in Malvoney's tent, drunk," he began, "but could not wake when I went in. Malvoney himself went west on the local this morning."

"Did you learn anything of the wireless outfit?"

"There is no instrument there now, but I found evidence of it. He has used Whaley for God knows what," he ended.

"I still cannot comprehend," she pondered, "why Mr. Malcom, usually so far sighted and shrewd, is blind to him, surely a menace. Did you find anything else?"

"Probably nothing of importance. I picked up a package of old films." He reached into his pocket and tossed the bundle over to her.

"These are mostly films taken by Whaley for use on our bills of lading," she said after a few moments' scrutiny. "Didn't you inquire of me concerning the cars on the siding when that fateful car was loaded?"

"Yes, I did," he replied quickly. "What have you there?"

"There's a film among these showing the row on the switch, including the 76533 B. R. & B." She held the film to the light. He took it from her and examined it closely.

"We'll have an enlargement made from that," he said. "I am going to follow any hunch I have, however nebulous, until I get the curves of that crooked mind. First, I have to go to Pittsburg. I want to see one of those empty cars that was on the siding."

"Do you really think there is a clue in this picture?"

"Hardly a clue," he hesitated. "It is so hazy I can't even put it into words, except as a sort of sixth sense prompting." He turned to her gently. "I don't like to leave you alone with double work again, yet every minute I wait will make it harder for me to get what we are after."

"I have rested enough," she assured him quickly. "You must follow every possible clue. I am well able to do double duty." She was excited, yet did not bother him with farther questions.

"You are a brick," he said, "and I shall not stay away a moment longer than necessary." He turned back at the door. "Several men

may be here from both the railroad and the government. Tell them everything you actually know, but nothing of our suspicions. Let them look around for themselves until I get back."

His first act on arriving at Pittsburg was to go to a photographer, who agreed to give him an enlarged print of his film in two hours.

While he was waiting he went to the car accountant of the road. He questioned him concerning the car he was trying to locate.

"The conductor's slip shows that all five of those cars brought from Bald Eagle siding were foreign empties," replied the accountant. "They have been turned over to their roads to stop the per diem charge. Two of them were B. R. & B's. and two were Wheeling and Lake Erie and one Pan Handle."

"What were the numbers of the B. R. & B.?"

The man consulted a slip. "76537 and 76538," he replied.

"Does your record show that the B. R. & B. have actually received them?"

"Yes."

"Then their record will show their disposition?"

"Surely. Their man will be able to put his hands on them at once, as they just got them."

After a long tramp to curb his restlessness Dorn returned to the photographer. The enlargements were ready, as agreed. Dorn studied the pictures with every sense alert. He then went to the B. R. & B. accountant and asked if he could see the two empty B. R. & B. cars.

"They're empty," replied the man; "what do you want of them?"

"Just a sort of thousand to one shot that I could get some information if I saw them, that's all," replied Dorn.

"Isn't it one of our cars that was loaded at your station with some kind of explosive, a case or two of which would be strong enough to blow the roof off of hell?" the man asked with a serious sort of grin. "There were two federal agents as well as two detectives from your road here this morning getting the history of that car, but that has nothing to do with these two empties, has it?"

"Probably not," smiled Dorn. "But they aren't losing much time, are they? That car was reported in trouble only yesterday noon. Where did you say those two cars were stored?"

"Our storage yards are out about three miles. Take a street car and ask for Barney Dunn.

You'll find him in a shanty near the track. He has a record of every car, also a freak memory, and knows the physical condition of every car there."

Dorn thanked the clerk and strode out. He had no difficulty in finding Barney Dunn in his castle between a three hundred acre storage yard and a dirty river. He opened his business at once.

"The car accountant said —"

"Well, what did that jackanapes say?" interrupted Barney, anticipating an argument, and shifting his black clay pipe to the other side where the tooth was gone.

"Well, Barney," Dorn ventured again, "as a matter of fact he spoke well of you, that is I guess he thinks well of you, but he said — "

"Now what DID he say?"

Dorn's eyes twinkled. "He said he sent two of your cars out here yesterday and that he would bet you had forgotten all about them by this time."

"Did he say that? DID he say that now? I suppose he didn't tell you what cars?"

"Yes, he said they were of a new series just delivered, 76537 and 76538."

"Well if that spalpeen clerk will come out here I will show him those cars quick enough over there on twenty-six ready for the first call for empties," said Barney, savagely chewing the black clay stem. "But let me see, yes, that's the same number — what is there about those cars? — you are the second man inquiring about them this morning."

Dorn sobered instantly and his heart leaped.

"There was a sort of Roosian fellow here this morning said he wanted two new cars to load — said something about cork or life preservers for the navy that had to go to New Orleans, or somewhere down there, and he lit on those two."

"What kind of looking fellow was he, Barney?"

"Kind of a squat, and the grease was runnin' out of his jaws, a dark fellow and great on the blarney."

Dorn's heart continued to pound. He believed the man described was Malvoney.

"The shippers are more agreeable than they used to be," he grinned to conceal his interest.

"Well, I never heard of a shipper coming out here and picking out a car before, but these are bad times. I explained to the yardmaster about it."

"Where is the yardmaster?"

"Working at the other end of the yard, but he'll be up in a half hour, if you want to see him."

Dorn said he would wait and walked slowly down the yard.

So there was, sure as hell, something to his hunch after all!

Chapter Sixteen

DORN HAD NOT LONG TO WAIT for the yardmaster, but the man seemed unwilling to talk. Dorn felt some suspicions that Malvoney might have bought him, so did not press the matter further. He waited until next morning and went directly to Carson, engineer of the switching crew. He identified himself to him as a brother engineer in good standing.

Carson instantly recalled Dorn's accident at Malcom's River and his transfer to the station there.

"Now, Dorn," he offered, "let me get it straight. Why do you want this car?" He delayed the whole crew to listen to the brief history Dorn gave. He examined the photograph and the bill of lading that Dorn handed him.

"I want to get that car back on the Bald Eagle switch at Malcom's Station," answered Dorn.

"But you don't make it quite clear why you want it there," the engineer insisted.

"I know I don't, because it isn't yet clear to me. But now that I have found Malvoney also is interested in that car, I am more than doubly anxious to get it safely away to Malcom's Station."

"Are you absolutely sure Malvoney is a German conspirator?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you jug him at once?"

"It is one thing to know he is a German worker and quite another to prove it."

"I'll help you, Dorn," promised the engineer. "We can trust this conductor here. I will call him and see how much he can tell. Hey, Pete," he called, "shake hands with Mr. Dorn."

The conductor accepted the request as complete endorsement.

"This man is in trouble," went on the engineer. "He is on the level and between us I want a little dope that will go no farther. Have you one of our cars here in which the yardmaster has seemed to take special interest?"

"Yes, it's 76538. He told me not to use it for anything at all."

"What do you make of that, Pete?"

"Nothing more than a few smokers, I guess," grinned the conductor.

"Which is the quickest way to get a car from here to Malcom's?"

"Send it to Allegheny Junction, and then over the Bald Eagle spur. It's only about ten miles across from there. The engine is coupling on a train now. She can take one more car." The switch conductor turned his head toward an immense mogul road engine moving slowly back to its train. Carson caught the slight suggestion and glanced significantly at Dorn.

"Where is that car now, Pete?" he asked in a low tone.

"Over on switch twenty-six, about ten cars back from the main track."

"And I have known you to be very forgetful sometimes, Pete."

"Indeed, yes, my memory is bad at times; then there is the night crew, you know; I can't keep track of them."

"All right. Forget that I said anything to you concerning that car, and go about your business." Carson started quickly across the tracks to where the road mogul stopped, talked in low

tones for a few moments with its engineer, then motioned to Dorn. He looked cautiously about and pointed toward track twenty-six, where the car was. Dorn needed no further hint. He darted forward to the road engine, cut the air connections just made, pulled the pin releasing the mogul from the train, and gave the ahead signal. Carson in the meantime had quickly climbed into his own cab, and was apparently paying no attention to Dorn's movements. As though self-constituted, the engine moved down the main track to switch twenty-six and in another two minutes returned with the coveted car, 76538, which Dorn coupled to the waiting train. There were three short blasts from the whistle, and express freight train 249 was off to Allegheny Junction.

Dorn climbed up the side of the great five-hundred-horse-power steam plant, which carried with it coalbins, waterworks and machine repair tools, starting up the mountain with over sixty full loads. He went to the right side of the cab and approached the gray-haired engineer, who looked at him with a keen eye well back under a bushy brow.

"Dorn," he began, "you know it is positively

against the rules for us to carry any one on the engine." He had to speak close to Dorn's ear so his voice could be heard above the mighty shouts of the engine getting headway.

Dorn nodded.

"But I am very glad you are here," winked the engineer, "for my fireman reports that he is sick. At least he will not work, and if you will fire in his place you can help us out."

Dorn nodded again with a smile. He recognized that Carson served him well; here was a friend. He went to the fireman's side of the engine and found the man taking off blouse and overalls. These he handed to Dorn.

"Buddy," he grinned, "how do you suppose you are going to negotiate nine tons of coal going up the mountain with those soft lily whites?"

"A few blisters never hurt any one much," replied Dorn, looking at the big pile of coal on the tender. He put his coat and hat in the fireman's box and adjusted the greasy cap, blouse, and overalls of the fireman.

"It isn't so bad if you know how to favor yourself, and I guess you do," said the fireman as he started back to the way car, where he was to stay

a sick man until they arrived at Allegheny Junction.

Dorn took the shovel, altogether familiar to him, and began to feed the insatiable maw of the motive power that was snaking on its ten wheels the unbelievable load up the mountain. Things were coming pretty fast but none too rapid to suit him. He could see the car just behind the tender where he was shoveling coal and he was more certain that Malvoney was interested in that car. While coupling it up he had paused long enough on one side to notice that the door was shut and sealed, and that the seal bore his own station number. But how in God's name did it get there? This was not the car he had loaded; this was number 76538. This car left the siding as an empty, and had been handled as an empty. At the first stop he would see if it were sealed on the other side. When he coupled it on it felt as if it had a load, but of this he could not be certain. Between shovels there was little time to spare, as it required nine tons to keep the engine steaming for seventy-five miles. A ton of coal every six miles had to be spread skilfully through a door little larger than a porthole over a 7 x 10 grate.

They were leaving a few minutes after ten. With good luck six hours would be required to climb those seventy-five miles. As Dorn shoveled with his long body bent almost like a jack-knife to see inside the small opening, he thought that unless Malvoney had paid a confederate in the yard they were leaving he would have to be pretty lively to keep up with him now. They would be likely to reach Allegheny Junction at four in the afternoon, and if this luck was still with him he would have the car back on the powder-mill siding in Bald Eagle Canyon before dark.

The passenger train that would pass them in three hours was the only means that Malvoney could use to follow, but it was leaving two hours behind them. Unless he was right on the spot, however, and had quick and secret information, there was no way for him to learn that he had the car and catch the passenger train. Dorn was positive no train record had been made of it. It was done so quickly that Dorn did not even have time to see if both doors were sealed after train bills were made.

When they came to the siding to allow the passenger to pass, it took them to the left of the

depot off from the main track to the coal chutes and water tank. Here five more tons of coal were piled on top the depleted tender and the water tank was refilled. This done they lay on the track, the engine some hundred feet from the station, waiting for the passenger. Dorn now had opportunity to climb down and examine the other side to see if his car were sealed there. Again he saw, affixed in the end of the pin holding the sliding doors firmly shut, the wire and metal seal bearing the imprint of Malcom's Station.

With the habit and instinct of an old engineer he touched the tender and sensitive backs of his now blistered fingers to the car's journal boxes, and had to withdraw them immediately, as there was considerable warmth. Such heat could not come unless the car had a load. He was almost uncontrollably moved to rip off the seal and at once settle the question, but he realized such a thing would be very unwise there. The passenger was whistling, and in a minute more pulled up with the smoking car abreast them as Dorn climbed back.

He leaned idly against the water tank waiting, his hands now blistered and black, his jacket and overalls more dirty and greasy. The tight-

fitting cap was no blacker than his face, which, with its peculiarly shaped nose, suggested an immense black parrot. He was unrecognizable as Dorn, the neat ticket agent at Malcom's Station.

His idle curiosity in the passengers in the smoking car did not last long. For his eyes recoiled as from the thrust of a knife when he saw Malvoney step springily from the front end of the car, not twenty feet away. He evidently was searching for something he knew just how to locate. With him was another brutal-looking man of undoubted Teutonic origin. Both men came directly to the car next to the locomotive, looked to see if the seals were intact, exchanged cock-sure glances, and returned to the platform of the smoker. They also looked furtively about, probably in search of Dorn, but failed to recognize or connect him with the grimy fireman, who began to take on a fire-box heat.

Murder entered the heart of Dorn as he scanned them, with fierce desire for justice and maybe revenge. To him they were bandits and murderers of nations who would ruin him and her. Was there not a time when murder justified murder!

Every man on this railroad was doing his duty. Malcom and his wonderful plant flashed before him. His own wearing and tearing experience of the last few days came back. His mind also went out to a girl's face, distinct to him in the bright sunlight. It seemed to have grown wan and thin for want of sleep and from over-effort. He heard the three blasts of the signal whistle, and the passenger train started to move. Malvoney would be brought close, but still too far away from the engineer's long arms. In Dorn's sight Malvoney's sleek face and greasy jowl changed to a fox, then to a wolf, and finally to a jackall.

Dorn stooped for the only available weapon as the train brought his man nearer him. His long, blistered fingers encompassed a big chunk of coal, and with the unerring skill of boyhood he let go from an arm as flexed as though made of steel. The missile struck Malvoney full in the forehead with such force as to smash the coal into bits. As the train gathered speed Dorn saw his enemy reel and fall into the arms of his companion, or he would have leaped as a tiger man on the fast-moving train and let his blistered fingers choke his life out and throw his body to the dogs.

Chapter Seventeen

DORN WATCHED THE PASSENGER train move rapidly out of their way, and saw the switch open to let them on the main track, as from a stupor. The lean hand of Collins tugged at the throttle, giving the great mogul the breath of life. Thus they began the last lap of his trip to Allegheny Junction, where he must devise some way to get his car over a mountain spur or branch track to Malcom's. He had surely left his mark on Malvoney, if he had not killed him. He was glad and began stoking the fire with a decisive grimness.

After a short time they had the first level track, and having a good fire he took a moment to see Collins, who viewed him with a knowing twinkle in his eye.

"You've had practice. You'd make a good bomb thrower," he said. "Your arm is as steady as your eye."

"Did — did you see him?" Dorn asked, at first apprehensive.

"Yes. Was that your man? He is right on your heels. But maybe you have finished him. That was an awful shot."

"That was him," Dorn replied ruefully. "If I have finished him it's a good job. May have to pay — but you are the only man who can prove it. Anyhow, I know now that I have the right car. I'll save it for the Government, from Boche. What jury would convict?"

"I've a poor memory," grinned the engineer.

"If he gets over that knock-out he'll be waiting for me at the Junction with the slugger he has with him, I suppose," said Dorn.

"Yes, but if we work it right, he can stay there and wait for some time."

"How's that?"

"You know, of course, that this track down the mountain to Malcom belongs to him. He wanted your people to build a switch into his coal mines, but they sidestepped until he began building it himself. Before they knew what he was doing he had built it to Allegheny Junction, and to a competing road. It cuts off from us one and a half miles from the station. I will

set you in there and you will roll every foot of the way if you can manage the other end. There is a shanty you can open with a switch key if you want to telephone ahead, as you should, to find if it's clear before you start."

"Are you sure about the grade all the way?"

"I've been in there many a time after coal. I know and as I understand it he wants this car worse than you do and will clear it for you."

"Yes, he needs it just as bad as I do."

"Then you will be stronger on his track than here. Use a club, a gun, anything if attacked, but be sure your brakes are right before you start on that track. It has bad grades and is crooked as a snake."

"It's a new car. The brakes should be all right."

"If you find them slipping, say your prayers. But you ought to know the game, you have run the mountains long enough," consoled Collins.

"I'll take a chance. Malvoney is spending lots of time and money to keep that car in sight. It is either the car I want or holds the key to the situation. I am going to have it or go railroading on the big Cut Off. And when I get it back, there will be murder if it don't stay

there." Dorn returned to his firing, eager to try out the man's hazardous and daring plan, and now little impressed that he had seriously injured Malvoney by breaking the chunk of coal between his eyes.

Dorn knew that this ten or twelve miles of mountain side road was not intended for much more than a switch to reach coal and hickory wood for charcoal. It was a bad road, a succession of reverse curves; there would be extreme danger. Yet were not those who traveled the seas in constant danger, were not those in the trenches and aeroplanes, those who were fighting the world's battles, in danger? What right had he to give peril more than a passing thought? He noticed for the first time blood on the shovel handle from his blistered hands, but the coal went in just the same. He did not feel the hurt. He was thinking again of the tired girl standing at the window of Malcom's Station looking out upon the track. Perhaps at that moment she might be wondering why she had not heard from him since he left her yesterday at noon.

In about an hour the fireman came forward and said he was recovered sufficiently to go to work and would let Dorn off at Allegheny Station.

"Do you know it is harder to loaf than to work?" he growled as he took the shovel even before he changed his clothes. "Hell, man, what have you been doing?" he added as he noticed the blood on both ends of the shovel handle.

"That's nothing," laughed Dorn, drawing water from the tank to wash. "Bleeding blisters on your hands don't count. It's the hurt hands that move the world and win wars." He handed the fireman his jacket and took the soap he offered.

The engineer had turned to watch them both as the fireman stooped to give the mogul her carbon diet. "It's only about ten miles more to Allegheny Junction," he said, "but the worst grade we have."

Dorn had time to finish washing and take a short rest before the intersection with Malcom's road was reached. This was something over a mile from the station and town known as Allegheny Junction.

The great mogul set Dorn's car in on the little branch at a place where it could be set in motion merely by taking off the brake. Then the engine returned to the train, coupled up

quickly, and went on, with Collins and the fireman waving good luck.

Dorn found the telephone as the engineer had said in a little shanty which he opened with a switch key. In a few moments he had Miss Fraser on the wire. In order to get her he had to take the risk of going through Malcom's office. He thought he recognized Whaley's voice on the wire when he asked to be connected with the station.

"Is there anything new there?" he asked the girl. "This is the first time I have had a chance to call you."

"No. Everything here is quiet," she replied. "Where are you now?"

"I am at Allegheny Junction. I've got a car — I think the car — and I am going to ride it down the mountain. I will be at your switch in about twenty-five minutes. Can you be there to open the switch and let me out on the main track so that I can make it by gravity to the canyon switch?"

"But how do you know the main track will be clear then?"

"I don't, but I can't wait here. Malvoney and his slugger are right on top of me. They

are bold and may be here any moment. See if there is any train due and if there is ask the dispatcher to hold everything out of Bald Eagle both ways of this track. Tell him you have heard of a runaway car. Can you do that?"

"Yes, if you must take such risks, I will manage some way. How do you know you have the right car?"

"I am not certain, but pretty sure. I'll know before I start down. Have the switch open in twenty minutes. Every half minute is important here. Goodbye." He hung up the receiver and snapped the switch lock on the shanty door.

He now was fully resolved to break the seals and see what was in that car. He must know. But he knew he must move quickly, as Malvoney or his manhandler or both might be there at any moment.

He ran to the car standing on the grade straining at the brakes. He examined them all carefully and found new shoes on every wheel. He then picked up the stout limb of a tree about two feet long to use as an additional leverage on the brake wheel. When he was ready to start he looked carefully about. Seeing no one he

tore the seal and wire from the end of the pin holding the door shut.

He trembled with anticipation as he put his weight on the sliding door to open it. Yes, by heaven, there was the pad that he had put next to the door, and there was the great stag head on the end of the little iron-bound cases! That was enough. He shoved the door shut, inserted the pin to hold it, went up the ladder like a monkey, brandished the stout club in his hands in defiance to danger below, and let off the brake with a great sigh of relief, but this was not the car they loaded — it was a different number.

The car began to move down the grade, as soon as he let off the brake, into a deep ravine of rock and trees, down to Malcom's Station, where Betty would have the main track clear and the switch open, so that he could ride the car back to the canyon switch from whence it had started, and then — but he refused to take more than a sip from the cup of delight. Such a triumph and vindication of every one and himself! He had played the game hard and on the square, and it could end in no other way if he had not killed Malvoney.

He had shoveled about ten tons of coal, a tiring task even to those used to it. His hands were still bleeding and tender as the exposed nerve of a tooth. Also, from facing the furnace all that time, his cheeks were hot and blistered. There was the fearful effect of the heat on his eyeballs, unused to the glare of the fire box. But now he was insensible to all this, intoxicated with triumph as the car gained headway slowly, creating a cool, soothing breeze in the ravines and woods. He raised himself, threw out his chest, and drank in the delightful air as if it were nectar.

He knew that great care must be exercised. He had the evidence for which he had fought, and in his possession were fifty tons of explosive that would level the whole mountaintop if let loose. The warning of the old engineman, Collins, came forcibly to him and froze the contemplation of anything but the track ahead that seemed terminating every moment against a solid wall of rocks and trees it wound about. He was forced to attend closely to the brakes and he realized that the load was fully the maximum for the car.

He inserted the club he had brought in the

spokes of the brake wheel, but this had little noticeable effect and the car continued to gain speed rapidly. Perhaps, he hoped, it was only a temporary grade, after which the brakes would hold better. But his speed increased until he had to brace himself at each new curve. He could hear the tracks sing and crack ahead of him, as if to warn of the approach of a hurtling body of wood and steel loaded to its full capacity with a sleeping volcano that if excited by sufficient jar or heat would — but he allowed his mind to go no farther. He took up several notches on the brake and leaned over to see its effect on the wheel that in the diminishing light of the canyon gave out a flame of sparks, as does a great emery wheel.

Dorn was now compelled to hold to the brake wheel to retain his position on top of the car. He believed the speed would diminish when the grade was less, but the great load carried over the lesser grades like a toboggan and went against the little one-and-a-half-inch flanges on the wheels that held them to the track with thuds that he knew were positively precarious.

The car swayed and trembled as it acquired express speed and Dorn felt the sickening terror

of one who has lost control of elements which he knows will destroy him. One moment he seemed headed for a solid wall and then the car would plunge around a sharp curve to escape it with such force that Dorn could feel the outside wheels rise from the track and fall back again with a jar that made him think in terror of the effect upon his load of explosive. His terror grew to a point where he was unable to look down at the deep canyon declivities beside the track.

He realized that he had tightened his brake to the last notch with the addition of his club and his long body as a leverage, and yet his speed increased frightfully. He began to think despairingly of his long, intensive effort to vindicate others and himself and save such value for the Government; was it going to end there in the canyon with the destruction that fifty tons of explosive would work! Such fear paralyzed him.

A few mountain folks who could hear him coming for a long way stood well back from the track frozen with fear as the runaway car passed them so fast that they appeared to Dorn as blurred figures slightly resembling human forms.

Dorn had driven a locomotive on the mountains and knew when speed became unsafe. He realized that now his car might leave the track at any moment, and then — at this point there came a calm in his mental turmoil. He gathered his long legs and arms about the brake wheel and waited for sure death. He began to wonder how long it would be after the car left the rails before the hellish charge of explosives would go off. Betty would be there at the switch waiting but his mind could not focus on that added horror. Even though miles away the explosion would kill or mutilate her.

When he pulled himself together he realized that the terrifying thumping on the flanges had grown less. He opened his eyes slowly hoping against hope to see before him a comparatively level track ahead. The car was slackening its speed and a mile and a half below him he could see the town of Malcom's. The brakes were holding. He loosened his hold of the wheel and leaned over to see if the car actually were stopping. He found that the brakes were red hot. Still dazed and uncertain he realized he must release them slightly or they would freeze to the wheel and stop him completely. But when he attempted

to release the brakes he learned that his strength of first desperation had left him. He felt weaker than a child, yet not to release the brakes would mean another catastrophe that must be prevented. Iron will flogged his body again. It required every atom of strength he could muster to release it enough to allow the shoes to cool for an instant. He then brought them up firm again, and now his feeling of relief knew no bounds though he still flew to the edge of the village where the track intersected with the main line. In a moment he would be at the switch. Betty would be there to let him in on it and on the canyon switch of the powder works. Here the canyon would be guarded and a special guard must be placed over this car until the mystery of the theft could be solved.

Then he rounded the last curve and from behind a clump of trees he could see the switch to their main track some fifteen hundred feet above the station. Yes, thank God, Betty was there! He knew she would be, and the target over the switch showed that it was open, right. He adjusted his brake, bringing his speed down no more than he was sure would carry him to the main track, and into the canyon. He ran down

the ladder to the last step, held on with one hand, and with his free hand touched Betty's in an instant clasp as the car passed her and took the switch.

"I've got it this time sure," he cried out as he pointed to the car. There was intoxication in her look of approval as she pointed toward the station, indicating that he was wanted there. He nodded that he understood and climbed back to the top of the car as it rolled along driven by gravity down past the station and the guard standing at the mouth of Bald Eagle Canyon.

Dorn had lived a lifetime in the last thirty minutes and emerged from a hair-turning experience into the Heaven of Betty's approval but now entered what always had seemed to him the granite roadway to hell, the powder-mill switch in Bald Eagle Canyon.

Chapter Eighteen

BETTY FRASER AGAIN HAD BEEN left alone with double duties to perform. She was commencing to feel the intensive strain effected by the incredible miscarriage of the valuable and dangerous freight, and evident bold daring crime.

Every time the train dispatcher or superintendent came in on the wire she felt the apprehension of uncertainty. And when there was a wireless message she trembled for fear it might be some order affecting Dorn.

Mr. Malcom had surprised her by his quiet attitude, yet she felt sure a volcano would break any time with terrible force upon the guilty.

Like nearly all the residents of the mountain community she regarded him with deep respect. As soon as Dorn's telephone call reached her she at once hastened to tell Mr. Malcom the great news. To her relief the powdermaker himself answered the telephone.

"He asked me to have the switch from your line open," she ended, "to let him out on the main track with the car he is to ride down the mountain. He said he would be there in twenty minutes."

"I am sorry he did not wait to have us send him an engine. There are grades for considerable distance, and I am fearful no hand brakes will hold a loaded car on them."

"He explained that every half minute counted and that he could not delay, Mr. Malcom. He spoke as if he knew just what he was doing."

"He is indeed brave to start down the mountain track with that car if he knows the nature of the grades," Mr. Malcom replied with grim anxiety.

Before Betty opened the switch she must ascertain if there were anything on the road going in either direction. The dispatcher replied promptly that there was nothing. With only a few moments left she hurried up the track almost a third of a mile, unlocked the switch, opened it to the main track, and not a moment too soon. The speed that seemed to Dorn as moderate appeared reckless to her as she stood at the switch. Out of the trees around the curve the

car came. She saw Dorn adjust the brake, run down the ladder, hold out his hand which she touched with delight, and heard his assurance that he had the right car. The wheels bumped over the switch and Dorn disappeared in the canyon.

Betty's joy at his deliverance and the knowledge that he had the right car, added to even a fleeting touch of his hand, filled her with new life and courage. She remained motionless even after she saw the car disappear, but suddenly realizing insistent duties she grasped the lever and closed the switch. As she clasped the heavy padlock she found it wet and sticky. Examining it closer she found that it was covered with fresh blood. She glanced incredulously into her stained hand which had held the lock. Then came to her the fearfully depressing fact that it was Dorn's blood from his bruised and aching hands. Yet he had been exultant and cheerful as he called to her in passing. But in her active imagination she saw his day's activities as she slowly walked back to the station. Tears that she never could have shed for her own pain now came in a flood and mingled with his blood on her handkerchief.

Mr. Malcom seldom came to the station except to take a train and Betty was astonished to see him waiting there.

"I came down to witness the bravest work ever performed," he explained. "No man on battlefield has shown greater courage and exercised such skill and judgment. I want to be the first to shake his hand and tell him that we are proud of him."

Betty glowed at his praise and flushed as if it had been directed toward herself. "Yes," she stammered, "it was magnificent courage." She went to the basin to wash the stain from her hands. "And look!" she cried, pointing to the dark red blotches, "see what it has cost him!"

"He will return here at once, won't he?"

"Yes, I told him he was wanted here and he signalled that he would come."

"I shall be glad to see him. For the last few days I have actually found myself suspicious of those I thought true as steel, but this cursed mystery has almost unseated my reason."

"Everyone will be relieved," she said. "Washington has been asking for Dorn for more than an hour and I am so glad he now can reply to them. I feel as if some important information about

this matter must have developed." Betty moved to the bay window and anxiously watched the track; expecting to see Dorn appear at any moment from the canyon.

"Have you sent a guard to watch that car?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes, I left orders with Whaley to send men down there at once, and I heard him telephoning my order. I want to ask Washington for another squad of Marines. My men should be with the car by this time, doubtless before Dorn left it. They will stay until relieved by the Marines."

Betty had wheeled from the window while he was talking and now came to him with troubled eyes. "You say you left that order with — Whaley — " she faltered, then bit her lips hard. She remembered Dorn's orders to utter no suspicion without proof but there was proof now. "Then, oh then, come," she pleaded with a sharp breath, "we must go down there at once and make sure everything is all right. I am commencing to feel frightened."

Malcom studied her white face and knew that she was checking great fear and suspicion of Whaley to more definite form. "He must have reached the siding," he said gravely, "and it is

strange he does not return. Yes, you are right, we better go down."

She turned quickly. "I can leave now at once," she said and adjusted her hat. She followed Malcom out, locking the doors behind her.

They turned down the track toward the entrance to the canyon. Betty was filled with terrifying misgivings over this incalculable misplacement of Mr. Malcom's trust. He had left his important message in the unreliable and perhaps traitorous hands of Whaley. She looked at the big man askance, wondering at his almost child-like faith in even the meanest of his employees. Surely he must have seen, as she and Dorn had seen, the yellow streak in Whaley.

"This is what it comes to," the manufacturer was saying as they hurried forward. "We load a car with all the care possible and send it away under military escort, guarded every moment. But it arrives at tide-water, empty. This fifty tons of freight, worth over a hundred thousand dollars and wanted in Europe on battlefields about as bad as the breath of life, is evidently transferred to another car, which was taken from this track as empty. All the railroad detectives admit that they are up against a wall. Dorn

finds the car and brings it back single handed." He looked down the track in the deepening gloom.

"Mr. Dorn's energy and force in this matter have been wonderful, prodigious," Betty agreed. "He has apparently accomplished the impossible."

"That's a cheering aspect, but the terribly depressing angle is that with an armed guard at both ends of this otherwise inaccessible canyon, which has been honest and clear laced for two centuries, it still has developed that we are involved in an impenetrable intrigue. It makes a profitable field for our national enemy's operation. Yet, I could swear that every man working here safe. I know them all but — but — Each has been raised here, all have the blood. How can it be?" He finished with the anguish of a father forced to face the perfidy of his child.

"It is the work of spies and enemies," she ventured, "and indeed clever work, but with an accomplice inside."

"But all my people are as true as steel." Yet his voice held a wistful question which seemed to invite her to tell what she knew.

"Such uncompromising confidence in your

people is part of your nature," she said gently, "and makes you beloved by all men in this community, but I now am going to brave your possible displeasure to tell you that I believe you have a traitor and a spy right in your own office, who has aided this nefarious scheme."

"Who is it?" as though warding a blow.

"Whaley," she replied with equal brevity, yet her voice shook. "Whaley, the very man you have entrusted to send a guard for this car a moment ago."

"How do you know he is a spy?" came back like the crack of a whip.

"I knew you would ask that, and this was the reason I could not tell you before. I only can say that we know some things by instinct more certainly than if we were given positive proof. Mr. Dorn and I have been waiting for that proof. Perhaps we were wrong not to speak before. We knew Whaley was bad. We should drive these traitors from here. The Germans here must be stopped. This must be a Marne and there must be a Joffre. It may be that this is the result of demanding too much proof."

"You may be right, child, but on account of such boldness under my very eye, my suspicions

have centered in that conductor who rebelled the other night."

"But he, alone, could have done nothing, without the help of spies within your own plant."

"I begin to realize that war brings terrible things. And Dorn," he added with deep feeling, "Dorn is our brave, capable man. He is our Joffre."

"But where is he?" she cried out with a new quick fear. "And where is the car?" They were approaching the switch where both should have been; the siding was empty and neither Dorn nor the car was in sight. Down the tracks towards the mill they saw men led by Whaley coming.

Then Betty's attention was instantly drawn to Mr. Malcom as he stooped beside the concrete platform with a groan. She rushed to his side and found him bending over the prostrate figure of Dorn.

Chapter Nineteen

AFTER HER FIRST SHARP CRY OF fear Betty remained white and still. Then she came slowly forward and bent above Dorn's bleeding head. Gently she sat down, and raised it until it rested on the soft cushion of her dress.

Malcom turned to Whaley and the men, iron in his soul. "Get a stretcher," he ordered, "and take Mr. Dorn to the powder mill hospital." Several of the men darted away to do his bidding, but Whaley stood limp and inert looking down upon the bruised head resting against Miss Fraser's shielding arms.

"You were too late, Whaley," said Malcom sternly. "The car is gone!"

"Gone!" His messenger looked blank.

Malcom swept his hand toward the empty siding.

"I did not understand your directions perfectly, sir," explained Whaley in a low tone. "We went

to the siding by the station first, and found nothing there. It took us some time to come back here to the office for better instructions."

"You knew what I meant, Whaley." There was the hard note of an iron will under strong repression in Malcom's sharp bitten words. Whaley flinched and went back to the mill.

"My God, Betty!" Malcom cried out. "I believe you were right. But I feel as powerless as a child. He has made it look straight enough. He may have misunderstood. If he is crooked, then he is as tricky as hell." This was the first time Betty ever had seen the old powder maker roused.

She had no power of thought or words. Her heart was pounding with a sickening pain because beneath her hand she could feel no stirring of Dorn's pulse. He had given his big life away in a final defeat. This, more than his bodily injury, seemed to stun her power of thought.

Malcom and Betty both realized how much had been depending upon Dorn. Now that he was helpless they felt the sudden onrush of panic. After giving his orders to the men to carry Dorn to the powder mill hospital Malcom seemed powerless to accomplish more. He stood in-

active, simply waiting. Yet somewhere in his own mountains that car must still be moving from them. His mind refused to focus on the problem. He felt for the moment like an impotent and feeble old man, waiting for his bulwark of strength to return.

The men arrived with the stretcher and Betty helped them lift Dorn gently to its canvas length. She stood silent and motionless watching them carry him away toward the hospital. She longed to follow and to nurse him if life still remained, but she knew she must return to her post at the station.

Once back in the little office the memory of Dorn's presence seemed to bring her fresh energy. She went to the telegraph instrument and sent out frantic messages, some wildly, others more coherent, in an effort to trace and check the movements of the stolen car. Malcom joined her a few moments later and he too helped in the search by wire. But their isolation stood in the way. The car seemed to have disappeared, as at first, into the air or into the depths of the earth. At the end of the afternoon, spent and discouraged, Betty gave up her task and walked slowly toward the hospital.

Dorn had not yet recovered consciousness, although the doctor held hope.

Betty had eaten no evening meal, yet felt little hunger. She forced herself to drink strong coffee, then went to consult Mr. Malcom again. She learned from him that several men from the detective bureau at Washington were on their way to Malcom's Station to help unravel the new phase of the mystery. In addition the railroad was sending a new telegraph operator to relieve Betty of her double duty.

"I am glad," she said quietly, "because I have almost decided I must get right down into this thing, that I must play more than a waiting woman's part." She spoke wearily only because her body was literally worn out. But the deep light in her eyes belied the heaviness of her tone and the slow raising of her tired lids. Tomorrow, after a night's rest, she was determined to enter the battle with all a woman's weapons.

"What do you mean, Betty?" he reproached. "You cannot leave us now. Not while Dorn is undone."

"I shall wait until I know he is better," she said in her tired voice. "But I have certain intuitions, instincts, perhaps, which I am going to

follow. To voice them would sound merely womanish. All I can do is work them out blindly. I have done all I can here. They have the car now, again; and it is not beyond our reach. I believe I know a way to follow it."

"You should tell me, Betty. I have been left too much in the dark," said the powder maker, smarting and dazed by the more certain duplicity of Whaley.

"I cannot tell you because my purpose is hazy, even to myself. You'll have to trust me, that's all. I merely know that I shall no longer sit here as a puppet behind wires. I am restless fighting only with mechanical tools and electricity. I want to get into it with my own hands and my mind and my blood."

He seemed to shudder. "We must not be hasty."

"You know," she reminded gently, "that the war department has asked all wireless operators who could, to enlist. They have said that provisions would be made immediately to relieve any who would give service in army or navy. Just let me try to thrash out a plan. I am too tired tonight but tomorrow I shall have a clearer vision."

Malcom placed a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"You're a brave girl, Betty, and I am proud of you. You can count on my help and support."

"I knew that," she smiled, and went wearily from his office. Tonight she experienced no sense of buoyancy. Her heart was heavy and she felt strangely alone. She seemed cut off from some vital mental current that until now had upheld her.

But when she reached her room she found a message which immediately electrified her. It was from Dorn. He was conscious and wanted to see her at once. Weariness fell from her. Her eyes brightened. She dashed cold water on her face, smoothed her hair and rushed out into the now darkened streets. She sped to the hospital and was at once admitted by a white-capped nurse.

"He must not talk long," the nurse reminded her. "Just let him see you and make sure you are safe. He has seemed strangely worried about you."

Betty nodded and followed the nurse to Dorn's cot. He was smiling as they came toward him. He stretched out his hand and even in its weakness Betty experienced in his touch a sense of re-established strength.

"They haven't finished me," he grinned.

"No," she exulted, "and they can't."

"Not until we are all through, anyhow."

"And we haven't even commenced yet." Her voice was tense in its determination. "I am going to get into it in earnest. Hurry and get well, Jack, because I can't go until you do."

"Go where, Betty?"

"I don't know yet. But we can't just sit here and wait."

"I think I understand you. I'll hurry and get well."

The nurse checked them and Betty had to go. But her step was firm and light as if she had rested many hours. She felt so refreshed she decided to return to the office and straighten out her desk for a possible successor. There would be no time to waste next day in details of routine.

At the station she was not surprised to find Whaley evidently waiting for her. It was almost as if the force of her own desire had called him forth. At sight of him her blood ran hot and her round knuckles gleamed white in her clenched fist.

"I came to inquire after Dorn," he said. His face was pasty and his eyelids twitched.

"He is little better," she lied. "This is not the place for living men, or," she added bitterly, "for human women either."

"Perhaps you'd like to get out?" he prodded.

"I'm going to get out. I'll take the first job that offers." Her heart was pounding harder as she played her first card. Whaley followed her lead.

"Say," he encouraged, "how do you stand with the old man and Dorn?"

"I don't stand at all," she burst out, as if giving confidence. "They're sending some one down here to take my place. They think I've fallen down on the job. That's all the thanks I get for killing myself in this hole."

Whaley opened his eyes wide. In all the years he had seen her about the little town this was the first time Betty had ever spoken more than two words to him of her own accord. "I wouldn't stand for it," he sympathized eagerly. "I think I know something you'd like fine. Shall I see if I can land it for you?"

"Might as well, but it will have to be quick. I'm leaving here in a day or two."

"I'll know in the morning," he promised.

She nodded and entered the office, waving to him in dismissal.

She watched him in the darkness until she knew he was some distance away, then went at once to call Malcom on his private telephone. She knew he would then be free from Whaley's listening ear. Mr. Malcom, himself, answered her.

"If Whaley asks for leave of absence, or shows signs of going away," she suggested, "let him go. It is part of my plan to follow him and if possible to accompany him. But I shall need first an interview with authorities at Washington. Can you arrange to send with me a certified messenger with an explanation and indorsement over your signature?"

"Yes, how soon do you want to go?"

"By to-morrow evening at the latest. I am to see Whaley again in the morning and I want to make sure Mr. Dorn is fully recovered, with no possibility of a set-back, before I go. In his weakened condition it will be better if we do not tell him where I am going or with whom. He will worry."

"I understand," replied Malcom. "I can

have Mr. Broadhurst ready to accompany you. I have sent him to Washington on special errands before, and he is known there. I shall be glad also to feel that you are in his safe care."

So with a little sigh Betty once more turned to her desk, worked over her papers for about an hour, then with the flood of her weariness full returning, walked slowly home.

Chapter Twenty

EARLY NEXT MORNING BETTY woke refreshed and doubly determined. Her first move was to telephone the hospital. She found that Dorn was rapidly improving and eager to see her, so she went to him at once before opening the station. She was amazed to find him up and fully dressed.

"But is this wise?" she asked anxiously.

"It's against orders," he admitted, "but I'm blamed if I'll stay bundled up in here while you do the fighting. This is no time to be sick. Besides, I'm all right except for an opening in my upper works and I am told that is held together by a dozen or more strong stitches. You see, the doctor, not knowing how much solid bone there is up there, is afraid enough injury has been done to cause a pressure. They fear that if my benevolence supposed to be located in the top is caved in, and my fighting powers remain intact, I might violate some one's personal

liberty if turned loose. I think Malvoney is worse right now," and thus related briefly his experience in Pittsburg and assault on Malvoney on his way up the mountain.

Betty was troubled by his light tone for it indicated to her his effort to conceal pain. "But you should go slowly now, Jack," she reminded, "so that you will be able to fight harder when we reach the real battle ground. Yet," she added with quick understanding, "I know how hard it is to sit still. Tell me what happened, can you?"

"Not fully, for I do not know. After I passed you I worked the car's speed down enough so that I could run ahead and open the switch and let it in on the siding. That is not a very easy thing to do and if I had missed it I might yet be going down the mountain, at least until I met a train coming up. I got the car in on the siding, cleared the main track by shutting and locking the switch, then I felt sort of collapsed, so before coming up to the station at once, as I should, I climbed to the little concrete loading platform and sat with my legs a-dangle, to rest a bit. My eyeballs burned so that I placed my head between my hands and my elbows on my knees. I had

been working in the glare and heat of a mogul machine for several hours without being used to it. The fireman shammed sick and I shoveled the coal. As I sat there, Betty, although undone, I was really happy for the first time in my life. Do you know what came to my mind then?"

"That you had saved the Government and the road and had vindicated us."

"Well, yes, I admit I thought of all that, but a sweeter thought held me there. I was glad I had squared myself with the Government, the railroad and Mr. Malcom, and that I had done something the Federal men or the railroad detectives could not do. I was glad I had outdone single-handed, without a cent, what the German conspirators and spies were spending loads of time and money to accomplish. Altogether, Betty, I declared an awful big dividend on myself as I sat there nursing tired bones and burning flesh. But that wasn't the big idea; that wasn't what made me happy for the first time in my life." Then by irresistible attraction he drew her eyes to his as they sat apart, and he continued. "The big thought that took me into another world, Betty, was the fact that you had trusted me and that I had saved our reputation here in your town at the little

station, that I had made good with you, and more, the solemn fact fastened upon me then that you belonged to me —"

"But, Jack, you must not talk now. There is so much to do — "

"Didn't you ask me how things happened down in the canyon? I am just telling you what came into my mind. I was sitting there in Heaven when of a sudden I felt as if a yard or two of ninety-pound steel rail was laid on my head and I went to sleep. I seemed to sleep for a long time and woke to see a smile come to the face of a very solemn Scotch nurse, who believes it a sin to smile."

"And you saw and heard no one before you were struck?"

"No, there was nothing except the deathly stillness that is in the canyon all the time when there is not a passing train. But, Betty, how was I found, how long did I stay there?"

Betty told him all that had happened and dwelt especially upon her suspicion of Whaley.

"Yes," he cut in impatiently, "but just now I want to talk of something else. I was told I must not get excited or allow my mind to dwell on unpleasant things, but when I raise the

most pleasant subject I know of you say I must not."

"But you must rest and recover first and then there will be time enough to — "

"But you sidestep my question and do not even say that you are glad I was thinking of you when I was — "

"You know I am glad, Jack, but that must be all — now — You have vindicated yourself. Mr. Malcom saw that car pass. He knows the risk you took in getting it down that mountain grade. That means that the Government, as well as the railroad, knows that you have done enough, all you could, and I want you to know also that I feel very proud of you. But my work is not done. I have not been injured and have done little to help. Let us consider how I can do more. Don't you think I want to serve my country, too?"

"Betty, you are talking wildly! I suppose staying at that station and doing the work of two men for over a week don't count for anything?"

"That was no more than thousands are doing when the nation, the world, calls for the best there is in every one."

"And, Betty, do you realize what your influence

accomplished that morning when we arrived in Hampton Roads and the car was found empty, when I like a big boob went to pieces, sat down and cried like a girl — "

"I don't believe you cried," she resented.

"It was nearly as bad. I gave up. I saw the whole world against me. I began to pity myself. But Lieutenant Pettingill about carried me back to the ship and brought me to myself. As they did not have a wireless operator at that time I volunteered to act in that capacity, to report my own sentence to Washington. The moment I touched the instrument, you, five hundred miles away, came instantly. You gave me new backbone. Is that nothing, Betty? Isn't it something to know that I would have gone into the discard if it hadn't been for my thoughts of you and your constant watchfulness?"

"It's nice of you to say that, Jack, but I don't think you would have gone to pieces, and I don't want you to feel that way. Also duty beckons me, and you should not try to discourage. That car has to be found, and I am going to find it." She sat in her chair with an alertness and tension suggestive of a lioness when her young is menaced.

"My stay here is going to be very short, though," he insisted. "I know that I am almost as good as new now."

"But are you going to ignore the advice of the doctor and everybody and — me?"

"If I stayed here in this temple of ailment a day or two longer I think I would go insane. I must get busy at something. Idleness, instead of activity, will kill me."

"All right, then. Get at something easy for a while. There has flashed all over the circuit an appeal for volunteer wireless operators on ships. A trip or two at sea will help you regain strength and keep you busy."

"But I want to fight those snakes here."

"I tell you such a course is unwise and futile. They will not stay here. You should know that. You will do well to get consent to go to sea as a wireless operator."

"Whose consent?" he grinned as he suddenly realized they were again growing too serious.

"Why — the doctor's — and my consent," she added. She looked him full in the face with an appeal he could not resist, for it held more than a mere request. "When I reach the station may I wireless your enlistment?"

"If I do — what then?"

"I have not finished my plans, but I am going to be busy, and there is something more I want you to tell me. What led you to believe that car which left the siding as an empty had anything to do with the load of missing explosives?"

"I'm afraid an answer will put severe strain on those twelve stitches," he mused. "I began first to think of that supposedly empty car when I saw some chalk marks on the trucks of the car we had so carefully guarded. Something about those numbers brought to mind that photograph of the string of cars stored there, you remember. Again, when we found that film I decided to follow up the movements of the entire string of cars. I had no real proof that this special car was involved until I found that Malvoney also was interested in it. Then I decided to have it at any cost, and reason out motives afterward. But how the boxes were moved from one car to another I still have not the slightest notion. That would be a feat possible only to the supernatural devices of hell. Yet if I had been given more time before they knocked me out, I believe I could have solved even that mystery."

"I suppose," she asked, "that the second dis-

appearance of the car was worked in the same way?"

"No, not necessarily. That was a far simpler matter. Probably Whaley heard me call you from the junction. Malcom gave him the order to guard the car when it arrived. He purposely misdirected the men, sending them to the wrong siding. In the meantime Malvoney or his henchmen had plenty of time to prepare to knock me out and spirit the car away. Yet, we must realize, Betty, that a thing of this kind could not be accomplished without the help of some one in the train service. There are copperheads there like Larson." He had started to pace the floor in tense excitement and Betty realized the bad effect that this renewed battle must have upon his already strained endurance.

"Come," she warned, "let's not get serious again. Dismiss everything from your mind just now but getting well."

"That sounds easy," he grimaced. "But how'll I manage it?"

"You are going to pay close attention to those twelve stitches," she said gently, "until you are ready to go on a ship as operator. And now I must go back to the station. In the meantime,"

she smiled, "you know from whom you are taking orders."

A lump rose in Betty's throat as she turned to go for she felt that this might be a final parting. But she did not wish to leave that impression with him.

As she passed the works on the way to the station Whaley came quickly from the office and joined her.

"You know I promised to tell you about that job this morning?" he blurted out.

"Yes," she answered. Her heart commenced to pound once more.

"Well, it's yours if you want it. Only you've got to be quick."

"What is it and where?"

"As I told you it's in your line. They want some one who can work both the telegraph and wireless. The money's good. It is hard to get wireless operators now, the army and navy gobble them up every one."

"Where is it?" she asked, but she already had decided that she knew.

"I'm not sure about that. It's a long way south, I think, but if you will go I will get you

either the money or a ticket, but you must leave right away."

"What do you mean by right away?"

"On the next train."

"Do you know which way it is, Whaley? I must know that before I can decide. This is very short notice."

"You've got to go east first, then to Washington. That's all I know now, and when you get there you will be told."

"The next train passes here about eight-thirty tonight. It's a through train and carries cars for Washington. Perhaps I can get that one."

"This concern wants operators very bad, and it's a fine paying job. If you possibly can, you better get that train. I will have the money or ticket by that time. It's a friend of mine who wants this help, and I am making the deal for him. Say you surely will be there and I will meet you at the train and give you the ticket money. I have told them if you agreed to do it you would carry it through."

"All right, Whaley, unless something turns up to prevent I will be ready to go," she promised as they came to the road leading directly to the station.

"Very well, that's settled. But can't you manage to keep the code or cipher you use to Washington?" he asked in a lower tone.

"I'll see. You mean the Government code! I think I can," she replied, inwardly exultant. She was sure now that her ruse had worked and that Whaley was acting as Malvoney's tool.

She walked briskly to the station and immediately flashed in Dorn's enlistment by wireless. She secured the code book and carefully tucked it into her blouse. During the rest of the morning she put her desk in order, preparing for her successor. By early afternoon the new operator arrived.

Betty remained with him a few hours, then telephoned Mr. Malcom that she would be ready to take the evening train. He promised to have Mr. Broadhurst, his special messenger, accompany her. She told him as much as she could of Whaley's plans, speaking in cautious terms which only Malcom could understand.

She ate a hurried meal and settled her affairs at home, purposely avoiding a harrowing goodbye scene with Dorn. She did not wish to have him know yet that she was working with Whaley. There would be time enough for that when he

was stronger and better able to bear the added strain of anxiety.

Betty arrived at the station a few moments before the train left. She was relieved to see Deacon Broadhurst, Mr. Malcom's trusted messenger, waiting near the platform, but she gave no sign of recognition then, lest Whaley should suspect their joint errand. Whaley met her, as promised, with the ticket and extra money for full transportation.

"Did you get the code book?" he whispered.

She answered with a nod.

"Don't be surprised to see me there, too," he confided. "I can get a good thing down that way. But we mustn't be seen together. Sit tight and I'll find you later. When you get to Charleston go at once to the Windsor Hotel. Some one you know will meet you there."

As Betty went inside the train she glanced at her ticket and saw that it was for Charleston, South Carolina. Her brain was a seething turmoil of unformed plans. The game was shaping to fit her own hand.

Chapter Twenty-one

THE NEXT MORNING DORN TOOK matters into his own hands and dressed for the street. Against the doctor's orders he left the hospital, promising to return later for an examination and dressing. He went directly to the station expecting to find Betty there.

"I don't think she will be here again," the new station agent told him. "She left last night on Number Twelve, and went in the Washington sleeper. I was just wondering who was going to take charge of the wireless. It has been sputtering out some kind of jargon ever since I came."

Dorn was deeply disappointed not to see Betty before she left, yet he was not wholly surprised. He realized now that she had been tactfully bidding him goodbye the morning before. He unlocked the wireless booth and threw in the switch that gave it wide range, tapping the world for its most important information for two

thousand miles in any direction. Although a bit wobbly, action was the tonic he needed. With the first tap of the instrument he felt a new sense of self-confidence.

He took some commercial messages for Mr. Malcom while Washington waited, and then as soon as they could come in he was astonished to find himself writing a message as follows:

"Jackson Dorn, Malcom Station:

As per terms your enlistment in the Federal Wireless Service, you will report as soon as possible to the Commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard for sea duty."

(Signed)

Again Dorn knew that Betty had set the wheels in motion. He prepared Malcom's radio messages for delivery and locked the wireless cabinet, then went to the office of the powder works.

Malcom came forward to greet him with outstretched hand and approving eyes. "It's good to see you out again," he declared, "they couldn't keep you down long."

Dorn realized the unusual warmth in the old powder maker's grasp, and his heart glowed in response.

"I'm still on the running boards," he said.

"But nothing save the fact that you are necessary in this world brought you down that grade alive," said Malcom.

"The most disturbing thought," remarked Dorn, "was the uncertainty of what would set that explosive going. I can play with a known danger, but a great monster force that one may set in action unwittingly gets on a fellow's nerves."

"Perhaps I should have told you more about it," mused Malcom. "I know I can trust you." He stood in thought for a moment, then reached into the drawer of his private desk for a paper prepared in his own hand-writing. He gave this to Dorn and scanned him closely. "This is the formula used to explode," he said. "It is furnished only to the Government, but I give it to you to provide against further distress. You have earned my full confidence."

Dorn studied the short paper and warmly expressed his appreciation.

"Mr. Dorn," asked Malcom lowering his voice, "do you know how those one thousand nine hundred and sixty cases of S. H. were transferred to another car while either we or the guard were looking?"

"If I could have time thoroughly to look over that car," Dorn replied, "I fully believe I could have solved that problem. But now I am almost as much in the dark as you. Mr. Malcom — " Dorn hestitated uneasily, "I am almost certain that Whaley is at the bottom of our troubles. I have wanted full proof before accusing him to you, but now I feel you ought to know."

"Mr. Dorn," regretted Malcom, "I have made it a point to err in the direction of tolerance and leniency with my people, but I am convinced now that Whaley is bad. He has not come to work this morning. A search of his room indicates that he has gone for good. There must be a black sheep." Before continuing he waited to see if Dorn would speak of Miss Fraser's plan to work through Whaley. But evidently she had not taken him into her confidence, so Malcom said no more.

"Where are the Federal investigators and the railroad detectives that I learn have been plentiful here the last day or two?" asked Dorn.

Malcom replied with a shrug. "They have so much to do they can't attend to it. I am going to double my private guards, both the mounted and stationary men at the mouth of

the canyon, and also see if I can do something more myself."

"And," cut in Dorn grimly, "I am going to do a thing or two more before I quit."

"But the first thing you must do," cautioned Malcom, "is to get squarely on your feet, then go in and do your duty as every man should for his country. When that is done, or this war is over, come to me. I have a place for you that will beat railroading, even if you became president of one." Malcom rose with Dorn and gave him a firm hand shake.

Dorn then left him to set his house in order to leave the mountain town. The next morning he presented the wireless message from the navy department at the gate of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, asking for the commandant.

"We want physically qualified men for special sea duty," said that official, "men who can stand almost any kind of jolt. You are now disabled." He glanced at the white bandage below Dorn's soft hat and was apparently none too well impressed with the applicant as first class navy material.

Dorn remained quietly looking at the toe of his shoe and as the commandant's remark called

for no explanation or excuse he decided to sit tight.

"Where are your credentials?" the official finally asked, more favorably impressed by this lack of futile apology.

"I have none. It was this message that brought me here." He held out the wireless from Washington.

"This is nothing, Mr. Dorn," said the commandant, but he showed more interest. "How am I to know you are all right?"

"Better try me," suggested Dorn.

"How?"

"Let me go to the wireless and prove myself. I understand that my coming in this way is a little irregular and that you are justified in demanding proof."

"You have never served in the navy?"

"No."

"We will go and see the chief wireless operator and he will no doubt give you a test," said the commandant.

Dorn followed him to an adjoining room equipped with a single wireless instrument.

"Mr. Mann," explained the commandant, "this man reports here as a wireless operator on

a wireless message from Washington. He has suggested that we prove him."

"That is simple enough. Let him go to the instrument and help himself," said the chief, jerking his thumb toward the instruments.

Dorn glanced over the wiring, located the switch, threw it in with a firm, practiced hand, listened for a moment to see if he had a clear air, and then began calling the operator of the navy department. It is quite impossible for one not knowing the secret changing calls to raise that office. The operator in Washington immediately replied, "ready." Then Dorn sent the following message:

"Jackson Dorn reports here from Malcom's Wireless Station without other credentials than wireless instructions from you. He is just out of the hospital where he was detailed for a short time,— result of a scalp wound. If this is so, please verify."

Dorn wired without a written copy and moved away from the instrument.

"Describe Dorn," came from the instrument.

"Light, five feet eleven, slender, eight shoe, and twelve stitches in top of scalp, obtained under circumstances he claims was wirelessed to you from Malcom's."

During the interval of five minutes taken at the Washington end to secure Dorn's record, another man, the surgeon in uniform, joined the commandant and wireless chief. They all tried not to show their interest in this West Virginia lanky product. The wireless chief and commandant were by this time satisfied that Dorn was all right, and were waiting only for a formal endorsement. Dorn sat as alert as a cat waiting for a mouse and with an exceptionally keen ear overheard a whispered dialogue not intended for him.

"But she has got to sail as a convoy, it must sail the moment we get an operator," reminded the commandant, "and I don't see how they can get along with only one."

"But we can't send a man on board with bandages."

"Can't something be substituted for bandages that will not show, if Washington endorses —"

At this point Dorn's attention was riveted on the instrument and he wrote the following message addressed to the commandant. This, of course, was heard also by the wireless chief.

"Dorn is available only with his consent for emergency. Use him, but release him as soon as

regular operators are available for wireless service. A commission will reach you for him this morning giving him rank as lieutenant, for bravery and great service."

The wireless chief nodded knowingly and repeated the message to the commandant who came toward Dorn with outstretched hand to congratulate him.

"That clears the atmosphere completely as an officer in the navy can go aboard with a wound apparent, while an enlisted man cannot," the commandant explained.

Dorn felt dazed with the unexpected honor. Commissioned for bravery and great service to his country! This seemed an unreality which he could not comprehend. The words of the commandant came to him as part of the hazy, delightful dream. Finally he commenced to realize it was true. He actually held the message in his hand, and the wireless chief had read the instrument with him and was joining the others in congratulation. What glorious news for Betty to hear. This was his first coherent thought. He realized that Mr. Malcom must have been instrumental in bringing this about. He no longer was to be a half discredited man under a

cloud. He had been vindicated by promotion above the ranks. But this appreciation of his past efforts only added to his resolution and dogged purpose to uncover completely the mystery and to round up the spy system that made the theft possible.

He stood near the wireless dazed with joy. Then suddenly the instrument spelled out a word, the signature to which again took his feet clear off the earth into the heaven of realized expectations.

"Congratulations — S — H —." And by the stroke of the sounder he knew the message was from a very strong but distant station. There was only one other person in the world who knew what that signature meant, and he would have known Betty's touch among thousands. Surely she had been able to participate in his happiness. His wish hardly had been formulated before he realized it had been granted. Nothing else mattered now. She was safe, was still in the service on some special duty, and was within reach of that station.

"Ah — Lieutenant Dorn," solicited the commandant, "one of our latest super-torpedo boat destroyers is ready to leave at this moment.

A loaded transport has been off Sandy Hook light twenty-four hours waiting for her as a convoy. You are the only wireless operator in sight now. Are you willing to go alone? It will mean practically continuous duty for more than a week."

"I am ready," came Dorn's instant reply. In less than a half hour Dorn stepped down from the Navy Yard dock into a queerly painted vessel about two hundred fifty feet long. When the lines were slipped she moved out into the stream with the power and precision of a locomotive. As he stood aft, he noticed how the fantastic colors with which she was painted blended with the water.

He wirelessed the monster three tunnel transport with its ten thousand men aboard they were coming, and in a half hour more they picked her up beyond Sandy Hook with two other scimiter shaped craft. All were soon absorbed by the sea, as a dissolving panorama.

Chapter Twenty-two

ALTHOUGH BETTY KNEW THAT Whaley was on board the train and would leave at Washington, she had no difficulty in evading him, as he purposely kept out of her way. It was not likely that he would wish to approach her until they reached South Carolina. If he noticed Broadhurst, Malcom's head accountant, in the car, he evidently had given the coincidence no thought.

Betty had joined the old deacon, and had talked with him all the way to Washington. It therefore seemed natural that when they reached the station they should walk together. Betty glanced behind now and then but if they were followed she could see no evidence of the espionage.

She did not know how much Malcom had told Broadhurst of their plan, and he in turn kept silent. He was also discreetly silent. Car seats may have ears. So they talked merely of casual things. They already had arranged, however,

that while Broadhurst interviewed the secretary of war, Betty might, without rousing suspicion, even if followed, visit the senate then in session. They agreed that at least one of their senators would be there, and hoped to work her plan through him.

Broadhurst helped her on a car going to the Capitol, gave her his blessing and hurried on his way to the Navy Building.

After an apparently interminable travel through arches, narrow stairways and sharp angles, Betty was finally announced to the senior senator in his private office in the Capitol. He saw her at once and gravely listened to her story. She told him of her entire purpose, her suspicions of Whaley and Malvoney, and her faith in her own ability to carry the plan through. Her earnestness and simplicity caused him to telephone at once to the War Department to learn if Broadhurst had been there with Malcom's signed papers, to verify Betty's story.

After listening on the wire a few moments he turned to her with a smile. "Mr. Malcom's messenger has arrived there," he said, "and we'll get this thing put through for you in short order. I like your grit. The secretary's first

assistant is on his way here now. You couldn't have caught us at a better time." He motioned her to a chair near by and turned to open his mail.

Before long a white haired man was ushered into the senator's private office. The senator left Betty to enter into a brief low-toned conference with his visitor, who then left. When he returned to her he held some official documents and a small book.

"You may never need to use these credentials. Cleverness seldom resorts to credentials. However, I have protected you fully. This book is a false code, so arranged that a message cannot be translated without distortion. It is used "to decoy operators who are being tested or suspicioned. This will enable you without danger to comply with the request for a code."

"I believe I understand," Betty stammered. "The genuine code I am to destroy under general instructions and produce this false code for them."

"You have the idea," the senator approved. "I shall watch your progress in this matter with intense interest. I know you will make good." He opened the door and stood aside deferentially as she passed. "And now," he added, "you have not only what you asked for, but all that you

intimated, as well. To farther protect you and to disarm suspicion I will have one of my clerks show you about the capital and see that you reach the depot in time to catch the train going south."

Before Betty could realize how everything was so quickly accomplished she was being shown the wonders of Washington by a respectful young secretary. She now felt little sympathy with the critics who intimated that Government matters moved destructively slow. Instead there was snap and punch. She had been in the senator's office less than fifteen minutes, and she had obtained everything Mr. Malcom undertook to get her by sending his twice trusted Broadhurst.

When she returned to the Union Station and went down to the train into her Pullman car, she was sure she saw Whaley in the smoking car as she walked back. His presence surely meant that Malvoney was not far away and Betty felt a grim sense of satisfaction and the pretty teeth came together hard.

Thus she entered into the great adventure of her life with zest and courage high. Her fighting blood was up and she took keen interest in the Virginia battlefields through which the train

ran on its way to Richmond and south. As she was carried onward her cheeks flamed, her heart beat hard with an all-consuming patriotism. Well — yes; there was a man: disabled just now. Her active mind went over her plan of strategy from a hundred different angles, until the next morning the train entered the wonderfully interesting city of Charleston, South Carolina.

Charleston easily could be loved for its faults. Its existence has been marked by turbulence, almost from its commencement.

When Betty arrived at the depot she at once took a carriage to the Windsor Hotel as directed by Whaley. She was assigned to a room on the top floor, in a manner indicating that she was expected.

After repairing the wear and tear of two nights on the sleeper she went to breakfast. In the dining-room she found as she had half expected, the object of her speculation. Mr. Malvoney advanced with a good counterfeit of surprise and greeted her. He insisted that she change her seat to the vacant place at his table where he was breaking his fast with a liberal meal.

"Well," he began, after she was seated and had ordered her breakfast, "I am more than

delighted to see that you made the trip without delay. I suppose you are puzzled to know why I am here and why I am interested in your trip."

"One must not be surprised at anything these days," she hedged. "But how did you get hurt? Your forehead looks as if you had been in quite an accident." She looked innocently at a liberal flesh colored patch in the center of his forehead.

"Yes, I fell heavily and cut my head," he explained. But she noticed his hot flush and recalled Dorn's story of that chunk of coal. It was hard for her to repress her smile of triumph. It must have been a square shot, she inwardly exulted.

"Quite unfortunate," she managed to reply evenly.

"I suppose Whaley told you I would be here?" he asked.

"No, he did not," she replied in simple truth, "although I inferred as much."

"The wireless business is a perfect monopoly," he explained, "and very profitable. I have undertaken to establish a competing system, and we have to proceed with great caution until we have advanced to a certain size, before we come out in the open. Operators are scarce now on

account of our Government requiring so many. That is why we wanted you so urgently. But remember," he cautioned, "our movements must remain strictly under cover just now."

Betty nodded understandingly.

"This hotel is friendly," he went on, "and has allowed us to establish our station in an unused portion of the top floor. We can hang our antennæ or receiving wires on the roof. You may find it rather warm up there during the middle of the day, but it cools off after the sun begins to get low."

"How much do your people pay?" she asked, believing that it would cause suspicion if she seemed to overlook that item.

"You need not be afraid about the pay. It will be liberal. Of course, at first there will be inconvenience, and perhaps long hours, but you will be rated high. How much were you getting from the railroad?"

"Sixty-five dollars."

"That's about fifteen dollars a week. Your wages with us will be forty dollars a week and all hotel expenses. But naturally we expect you to work for us, entirely, and to be very discreet about all information. There must be no leaks."

"The railroad drills we get instill caution into us from the start."

"You may be surprised to know that Whaley is here also," he informed. "I was able to get him a position here, too."

"That was splendid of you," she said.

He rose and pushed back his chair. Betty followed him to an elevator of ancient pattern and they were laboriously lifted to the loft of the old hotel. He led the way to the wireless room, a small space with bare, rough walls, lighted only by two small paned windows. The room had been provided with two chairs and electric fan and a liberal supply of ice-water. The instruments were arranged between the two windows and Betty was glad to note that when sitting at the table she could look out upon the harbor.

"This room has been hastily prepared for us," he said, "and of course lacks even ordinary comforts, but quite likely we will need you elsewhere before long." He scanned her closely for some hint of disapproval, but she merely nodded her head. "This instrument is very powerful," he went on. "It has as much radius as any of the Government stations, or about two thousand miles. It will deliver a great many messages not

intended for you, but we think it wise to copy all of them you can, as we want to convince the authorities that we have the equipment to do extensive and thorough work, and while not licensed by them now, we expect to be very soon."

Betty accepted his crude explanation in silence, wondering that he really could believe her so simple. She knew the punishment attached to running an illicit station, and was glad of the protecting credentials. Otherwise she realized she would be considered as guilty as he, the moment she commenced work on the instrument. Doubtless he meant to hold this as a weapon over her head.

"I shall be busy elsewhere," he informed as he left her, "and may not see you until the end of the day. If anything comes up that you do not understand just use your judgment and do the best you can the first day."

When he had gone, she threw in the switch. She felt an indescribable relief to be in touch with the great world again. It was a short time after that she heard the message from Washington to the Brooklyn station telling of Dorn's commission. Knowing full well her position could not be defined, she broke in with congratulations.

Chapter Twenty-three

BETTY COULD ONLY HOPE THAT Dorn would be within hearing of the instrument when she broke in and offered congratulations. Her delight at this news that he was able to be there, of his commission, crowded out all other thoughts. Mr. Malcom undoubtedly had opened the way and perhaps her talk with the senator had helped some, too. She hoped so, for she had dwelt strongly upon Dorn's brave sacrifice to restore the explosive so much needed on the battle field then.

She forced herself to put Dorn from her mind and soon was busy getting all the messages that went through the air. Most of them were in cipher. She soon found use for the chart hanging in front of her showing the latitude and longitude of land and sea as far as the coasts of Europe.

When Malvoney returned late in the afternoon she had a goodly amount for him to look over. He carefully separated those going to, or coming

from, Washington and gave these his first attention.

"You have a code book?" he asked carelessly, pulling his chair up to the end of the instrument table.

"Yes, do you want to see it?" she answered readily.

"There are a lot of code messages here which may have a bearing on our business," he explained, "and I would like to decipher them."

She reached into the table drawer for the little book that the senator had given her to meet just such an emergency. She wondered with some amusement how the deciphering from it would read. She watched Malvoney covertly as he struggled to interpret the messages she had intercepted.

Of a sudden as though violently stung he jumped from his seat. With a black scowl of angry excitement he paced the floor. "Damn the luck!" he fairly hissed from between set jaws.

"What's the matter?" Betty asked quietly.

"Latitude 27, longitude 79," he ripped out and leaned forward almost against her to verify the location on the chart that hung in front of her. "That means off the east coast of Florida, above

Bahama Islands." He seemed to have forgotten her presence, and she watched him breathlessly as he took a small book from his pocket, evidently his secret code, located a page, and studied it.

"Call M-E-R-B-," he ordered sharply, "and keep at it until you raise them."

She began calling and he continued to pace the floor. She had called only a few moments when the response came clear and positive. He stopped behind her indicating that he could read the instrument.

"Strike while the iron is hot," he dictated as code proof. She sent the signal as directed.

"The weld is good," came in reply and then followed a long message in cipher. He deciphered this almost as fast as it came by reference to his own book. Two words, "Black Vomit" made a distinct impression upon Betty. This term she associated at once with misfortune and illness and concluded these were the probable cause of Malvoney's great perturbation.

"Tell them that BLACKSMITH will call them in an hour," he ordered. As she proceeded to do this he sat at the end of the short instrument table and began to decipher the message more carefully. He wrote it out in full on a pad of

soft print paper and studied the message thoughtfully for some moments. Then he resumed his pacing of the floor. At last he came to her with regained composure.

"I will go down to my room to clean up a little," he said, "and will be back in an hour to prepare a reply to this fellow. I think I can give him some information to help him." He tore his transcript of the message into fine bits and tossed them from the window before leaving the room.

Betty now realized that Malvoney could read the instrument, but for some reason could not send. She wondered why. She also remembered that when he was writing out his transcription he had labored hard, using a short pointed pencil upon which he appeared to bear much weight. She took up the pad he had been using and found as she had half hoped a good impression of his penciled words on the blank surface. She was able to trace in the grooves with a sharp pointed pencil. In a few moments she had before her a copy of the message he had so carefully destroyed. A second reading intensified her interest as it opened a new door into information that might be of vital interest to Washington. It read as follows:

"The Weld is Good."

"Five days out of Vera Cruz wireless operator dropped dead at instrument with Black Vomit, very contagious. Remaining operator may go any time. Must have at hand at least one operator when off your station. Cargo riding well and plenty fuel for destination. Am about four hundred miles away and will be abreast you tomorrow night at sundown. Keep in touch for information of remaining operators. We cannot possibly proceed without operator.

(Signed) MERB."

Betty tore off the message as she had traced it out, and placed it in her blouse. She wondered what the term Black Vomit meant. She knew that August was the worst month for disease and of course the Gulf ports would be teeming with fevers of most deadly type. Conditions there were unsanitary. She must know just what Black Vomit was as soon as possible.

Malvoney now entered with a long message in cipher.

"Raise M-E-R-B- again," he directed. "Prove yourself by the words, 'strike while the iron is hot.' Give him this message, then you had better go down to your dinner. I have to go out for a while but shall be back in time to see you before you leave for the night."

She obeyed without comment and received from M-E-R-B- "All well on board yet." Betty carefully locked the wireless room with the key Malvoney had given her and went to her room to prepare for dinner. As she sat in the almost deserted dining room her mind was busy with the problem of the last messages.

Evidently a ship of some sort had started for Vera Cruz with valuable freight for Germany. One of the wireless operators had died from disease contracted before leaving that port, and as the disease was contagious they were afraid the remaining operator might die, thus leaving them without eyes and even though armed an easy prey to Allied ships. She wondered if the priceless freight of the stolen car were on board that ship. But what was this Black Vomit? Perhaps the old black waiter would know. Quietly she called to him and he stood above her table in respectful attention.

"Is this a healthy place?" she asked with an encouraging smile.

"Oh, yes indeed, Miss. No sickness round here like there used to be."

"Did they ever have Black Vomit here?"

"Oh, yes, Miss, a long time ago we had Yellow Fever here, but everything is all right now."

"Then Yellow Fever and Black Vomit are the same?"

"Oh, yes, Miss, just the same, but it's a long time since it was here." And by more simple words and low bows he tried hard to convince her that she should be easy on that score.

She finished her dinner quickly and went at once to the creaking elevator. She was surprised to find Whaley in the hall, evidently waiting for her. They went together into the ladies' parlor on the second floor front.

"I see you are on the job," he grinned. She saw that he had been drinking heavily.

"Yes, Whaley, I've just got settled. Where have you been all this time?"

"I've been busy outside. How do you like the old man?"

"I think Mr. Malvoney will be all right when I get used to him."

"Yes, you'll like him, but of course while he is a good man to work for, he isn't exactly one of us. We should stand together, shouldn't we?"

"Yes, Whaley," she gently encouraged his confidence. "But you mustn't drink too much."

"I don't drink much, Betty," with undue familiarity.

"But you've been drinking this evening. And starting out with a new man and a new job you should be careful." She was placing working foundations for new confidences. "What have you been doing all day?" she prodded.

"I've been trying to get some work done by these lazy natives. Of course, Betty," he shifted, "you know I always thought a lot of you, though I never had a chance to tell you back there." He hitched a little closer but she checked him.

"Let's not talk of that now. Tell me what you've been doing. That will be more interesting."

"All right, some other time you'll let me tell you?"

"Yes, Whaley. Now, what have you been doing all day?" she repeated persistently.

"I've been carrying some boxes to a boat."

"What kind of boxes?"

"Have you promised to be pals?" he hesitated.

Betty's smile was wholly encouraging.

"I don't mind telling you," he leered in his drunken glee. "You see Malvoney is a very

smart fellow and has everybody I ever saw backed off the board. And money — He's got more money than he can carry, and he makes monkeys out of the best of them. You know that car of S. H. that made such a row in Malcom?"

Betty nodded, her heart leaping into her throat.

"Well, he made monkeys out of the Government, the railroad and old Malcom, too. He played them for suckers, and when that fool Dorn brought the car back and got his, the play was just begun. Do you know that, Betty?"

Betty shrugged her shoulders and was afraid to look at him for fear of divulging her feverish interest. She gazed across the street and was agitated by a glimpse of Malvoney as he entered a cigar store opposite the hotel. She felt he would return immediately and she did not want him to know that she had questioned Whaley.

"Yes, go on." she breathed.

"Well," hesitated Whaley, "it's great what a roll of twenties and one or two real friends on the inside will do. Every box of that stuff came in here this morning by express. Every case is sewed up in burlap. I've had a lot of niggers carrying it across to a boat. We're going to load

it on a sub, sure's your alive." Whaley began to laugh uproariously.

"That was a clever piece of work, Whaley," she encouraged.

"Clever? Why I tell you the old man is a wizard. There he is across the street now. Do you know who that man is he is talking to? That's one of the biggest wholesalemen in the place, and he owns the boat we've been loading. I tell you, Betty, there's big things going on and you and I will have part in them. We're in right now. He gave you a big raise, didn't he? He did me, too. But he's coming and I must go down. Don't tell him we was talking, will you?" He managed to get his heavy feet down the flight of stairs. Betty did not wait for the elevator, but flew up the stairs and darted into the wireless room.

Chapter Twenty-four

BETTY'S FIRST IMPULSE WAS TO flash out her important news to Washington, and if possible, to Dorn. She was tingling with an almost unbearable excitement. But she knew she must act with caution, so she checked her impulsive fingers.

The lost explosive that Dorn had risked more than a dozen deaths for, that governments wanted so much that money terms ceased to apply, that she had bequeathed her own life to recover, was at that moment in Charleston sewed up in burlap, to be loaded on some kind of vessel, likely the one for which an operator must be found. This much she knew.

She heard Malvoney mounting the stairs and tried to conceal her excitement. But in spite of herself she still appeared white and shaken.

"You seem upset about something," he commented darkly. "Were you able to reach that boat M-E-R-B-?"

"Yes, I was able to raise them at once, then went to dinner. They reported all well on board."

"Do you know," he snapped, "I believe I have made a mistake in bringing that drunken Whaley here. I just met him in the office pretty well tanked and just at a time when I should be able to depend upon him."

"You have had much experience with men," she flattered, "it may be that you have made no mistake. Perhaps he will quit drinking."

"It can't be done. When a man has that in his system, he never gets rid of it till he shuts off his breath. Now, I am uncertain just what arrangement to make for the night. Of course if we had another operator it would be easy. There is hell to pay, but I can't ask you to stay too long or you won't be fit for tomorrow —"

"There will be little to do," she broke in, "and likely I can get some sleep. I don't mind staying." She was visioning the possibility of raising Washington.

"No, that won't do," he objected. "It is after seven now. Suppose you stay until ten, then I will try and make out from that time on. They have fixed a room for me right next here." He

jerked his thumb toward the adjoining wall. "I can hear the instruments from there. I can read them all right. I hurt my right hand not long ago and it is yet so stiff I cannot send. I have not learned to operate with my left. I suppose if it becomes a matter of emergency you wouldn't mind coming up to take a message, would you?"

"I'll come if you need me," she replied and he went into his own apartment. She could hear him distinctly moving about in his room. Any hope she had of using the wireless sank. As the sound of the sending key could plainly be heard in the next room, she could not take such a chance.

But just as she had given up hope she heard Malvoney leave his room and go down the uncarpeted stairs. At that instant she also heard a call clear and distinct coming from a powerful instrument. There was something familiar about that call. She felt as if some one had taken her by the hand. She had that sense, well known by every operator, so delicate that she could recognize every principal operator on the line by his touch. This call, and the message that followed, came to her as familiarly as if Dorn, himself, had spoken.

She could visualize him bound east on a convoy. Although she was sure Malvoney had left the next room she felt unsafe as he might return and hear any answering call. The stakes were too high and she would gain more by waiting. But she now felt certain that Dorn was within reach. From memory of the code she deciphered the longitude and latitude. She examined the chart before her. Evidently he was about three hundred miles from New York, out of the ordinary course for vessels, probably headed for the Azores.

In a few minutes her delicate ear detected sounds in Malvoney's room, and she knew she had done well to wait. At ten o'clock, as instructed, she locked the door and went to her room on the floor below. She was afraid to telegraph or to telephone, and to write would be too slow. She realized that when Malvoney had selected that particular hotel in Charleston, he knew what he was doing. He was among friends or paid tools. She would have to curb her excitement until morning.

Before she went to sleep that night she memorized the code words translated by Malvoney in the message received from M-E-R-B-.

At seven-thirty the next morning, she encountered Malvoney coming from the dining room.

"Anything new, Miss Fraser?" he asked.

"I left copies on the desk of everything that came before I left at ten." As he passed her she noticed that he evidently had bolstered himself with liquor.

"Did you see Whaley during the evening? That dog was drunk," he snarled. "And I could not find him. He will ruin us if I don't muzzle him."

"I think I caught a glimpse of him in the office as I came from the elevator just now," she informed.

"All right, I'll try and catch him. I am going away for a couple of hours but will get back by ten. Raise M-E-R-B- as soon as you can and tell them we must keep in touch all day. Unless something important shows up do nothing else but follow them." She watched him go toward the office, then hastily entered the dining room. She ate quickly, made sure that Malvoney had left the hotel, then hurried to the wireless room.

She connected her instruments and at once began calling S — H. S — H. S — H. If Dorn

was within hearing she knew he would answer. She continued this call for fifteen minutes without result. She kept her ear trained on her instrument for a reply as well as on the stairs for a possible footfall. She was trembling with suspense. Finally she was rewarded. Clear as a bell came the familiar touch. Her heart jumped as though relieved of a great weight.

"Who calls S — H?"

"Who could call S — H?"

"I know you."

"Latitude — Longitude — Charleston, S. C. Where are you?"

"Convoy 3 — 3 Latitude — Longitude — Course — by — second day out 27 knots. All's well, jolt benefited head. What's the news?"

"Cargo sub bound from Mexican or Gulf Base to Germany, abreast my position tonight. ' Will take on board lost S — H. in burlap covers. M. and W. also will likely go on board. Reach Washington with this. I am watched and probably cannot call you again today. Keep tuned to my instrument now."

Betty knew that Dorn would now listen while she began calling M-E-R-B-, as instructed by Malvoney.

M-E-R-B- soon replied.

"Strike while the iron is hot," Betty answered distinctly so that Dorn could not possibly miss the identification signal. M-E-R-B- replied as usual, "The weld is good." He then proceeded with a long message in cipher. He had this repeated to him and instructed the station to keep in touch with him constantly all day. He further informed that he was coming toward them.

"Did you get it?" Betty risked, as soon as M-E-R-B- had finished.

"Yes, will try in a half hour," Dorn replied instantly.

Betty pictured him in the wireless room of a destroyer watching the movements of the receiver with an intensity that would tear from the instrument information he wanted by sheer force. It was hard to tell which delighted Betty more, a realization that both of them were fast becoming very useful to their country, or the fact that they were so useful to each other.

Her thought then went to the message she had received from the cargo submarine stealing up the coast in the edge of the Gulf Stream. Malvoney would return any moment now, and though

she made a carbon copy of the message she could hope for no repetition of her former luck in being able to transcribe the words. She could make out the words Black Vomit and the code word indicating six. Six died, of course. A plague ship, surely. Latitude and longitude she was able to make out from the numerals in Malvoney's former translation. They had covered more than half the distance and would arrive abreast Charleston in about eight hours, or at five in the evening. They would easily be able to take the cargo on before dark and proceed that night if that was the plan. She wondered how the loading would be accomplished in daylight and if Malvoney were going on this cargo boat.

Her speculations were interrupted by Malvoney's step on the stair. The next moment he burst into the room.

"Anything new this morning?" he asked.

"M-E-R-B- finished sending this message just now," she said, handing him the original copy.

He took the paper with a shaking hand and walked to the window as he read it. He was looking worn and haggard. His expansive girth had shrunk, as the tailoring of his vest indicated.

Great wrinkles furrowed his brow as he read the message. As before he drew his chair to the corner of her table and painstakingly transcribed the message. He leaned back to study its import, then his head dropped forward on its tallow cushion and remained bent in deep and troubled thought. He covered his face with his unsteady hands and Betty was able to read without noticeable effort the words he had written. "Six men and first officer died last night with Black Vomit. Bring formaldehyde and any good germicide."

"Has Whaley ever been up here?" he finally asked.

"Not that I know of," she replied.

"Whaley is no good," he growled, and continued his habit of pacing the floor. "Does the radio show anything else important this morning?"

"I have as you instructed tried only to catch M-E-R-B-, and I raised him as soon as possible."

"Any signs that this station is known?"

"No," she answered simply, wondering how long he was going to try to maintain the fable.

He went into the adjoining room where she could hear him moving about for an hour or more, then he went down stairs, but she felt he would return at any moment and knew it would be

dangerous to call the Government at Washington. She also realized that she could trust Dorn to get in touch with the authorities at the first possible moment.

In a half hour she again heard Malvoney's step on the stair.

"How much time will you require to pack?" he asked abruptly.

"You mean to leave here?"

"Yes, bag and baggage! It is necessary for you to go to a new station."

"A half hour will be enough," she replied, fully resolved to go to any length to finish the dangerous work she had undertaken.

"Be ready and down in the office promptly at eleven, then. That will give you thirty-five minutes. Be sure and get all your things from here and don't forget that code book in the drawer."

"All right, I will be there." She rose to put her desk in order and withdrew the switch from the instruments.

"Let me have your key to this room," he said.

She passed it to him and took the code book from the drawer and left for her room on the floor below.

Hastily she packed, wondering what was about to happen. She decided it was unsafe to retain the true code book. Therefore in accordance with part of her secret instructions she took the book, held it over the wash stand and poured upon it an acid furnished for that purpose. The paper turned black and crumpled into fine powder. But the leather covering did not respond to the treatment so quickly. As she was pressed for time she tossed the empty cover back into her suit case and hurriedly went down to the office. There she found both Whaley and Malvoney waiting.

They at once entered a private automobile and in a twinkling were whisked to the wharf where a private motor boat was waiting. She recognized the boat owner who accompanied them as the man she had seen talking with Malvoney in front of the hotel. She learned that his name was Bishop. He and Malvoney at once commenced to talk in low tones. Evidently something grave was disturbing them, because Malvoney's face grew even more pasty and he looked askance at Whaley.

Whaley seeming to feel instinctively the atmosphere of hostility slouched back nearer Betty,

and as they entered the boat he crouched close to her side.

"What do you think of it?" he whispered, nervously lighting a cigarette with his yellowed fingers.

"I don't know what to think, Whaley, because I don't know where we are going." She tried to encourage his confidence again.

"I don't either," he shivered, "and I'm commencing to get cold feet. The old man raised hell this morning. I wish I was out of it."

"What's been keeping you so busy? Did you get the boat loaded?"

"Yes, we finished that in the night after I left you, and she's gone."

"What kind of boat was it?"

"One of those old sail boats that carry manure out to the islands."

"Where are they taking it?"

"I don't know. The old man has been mighty tight with me lately. I'm in bad with him, I guess. But I imagine we'll come up with it before we get off this boat."

At this time a negro dressed in white came from below bringing a small table covered with a linen cloth.

"I guess we are in for some good eats," speculated Whaley, noting the preparation with elation. And as the fast little boat sped seaward over the bar out of the harbor a liberal luncheon was served.

Betty ate with little comment but watched Malvoney's every movement. Whaley soon left her and went below. She was relieved to be alone with her turbulent thoughts and conjectures. There was no doubt now that she was bound for the cargo submarine due off Charleston. Evidently she was to be put aboard that plague ship to take the place of a wireless operator who had recently died of the dread disease. She knew that six men and the first officer had died during the last twenty-four hours, and that the disease on the ship was at its height. At first she recoiled in horror at the thought. She was mere flesh and blood, after all. But she stiffened herself with the memory of the thousand deaths Dorn had faced and was still facing. She determined to see it through. She must not let herself dwell upon her own personal danger. She settled down on a couch in the cabin, wishing if possible to sleep. Presently she dozed and was wakened by harsh voices near the cabin door. She realized that they now were in rough water.

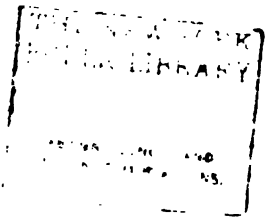
"Good God, Whaley," Malvoney was protesting, "don't act like a damn fool. This craft is in no possible danger. You boozed too much last night."

She turned her head and saw both men on deck. She also was interested to note that the motor boat was now towing a little sailing vessel.

"I don't believe you," groaned Whaley. "This damned tub will sink." He was shaking with genuine fear of death. "I want to go back. I didn't want to come aboard anyhow, but you made me. I never can stand this." He writhed in his deck chair very sea sick.

"I know you are very sick, Whaley," soothed Malvoney, with a sneer, "but this is the safest place for you. The boat is not going to sink. Brace up. Suppose the worst comes. There is a fine lot of life preservers on board. When you have one of those on, you can't possibly sink." Malvoney glanced toward Betty who still pretended to sleep.

"See," he continued, "here are piles of them." Malvoney pulled a life preserver from a chest fastened to the deck. "This one will just fit you." He dragged Whaley forward on his chair and adjusted the straps that fastened the belt to


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"*The wretched man* plunged headlong into the sea."

the body. "Now you are as safe as though you were on land."

Whaley opened his eyes to look down at the contraption of which he knew nothing. The boat was now rolling in the heavy sea and caused Whaley additional distress. With a supreme effort he gained his feet and made for the rail.

Malvoney stood close behind him in an attitude that made Betty half rise from the couch. When the boat rolled violently to that side Malvoney with a dexterous movement flipped Whaley's feet from under him and the wretched man plunged headlong into the sea, and sunk like a chunk of lead.

Chapter Twenty-five

BETTY ROSE FROM THE COUCH WITH a quickly stifled cry, for realizing her own danger she sank back again and pretended sleep. Bishop, the boat owner, was approaching, and he and Malvoney were watching her. She could feel the dark piercing eyes of Malvoney, even though her own eyes remained closed.

"No, she's still asleep," said Malvoney in a relieved tone, "yet it doesn't matter much, she's in too deep herself to back out now. That damn fool Whaley didn't know there was lead in that life preserver instead of cork."

"War calls for the exercise of all our faculties," remarked Bishop.

Betty was filled with a mingling of horror and relief. She had despised Whaley and believed he deserved his fate, but the ruthlessness of Malvoney's methods appalled her. She saw reflected here her own fate if she crossed him, or was

detected in her deception. She said amen to Bishop's remark.

She concluded that the little vessel they were towing contained the cases of S. H. well disguised in burlap, according to the information given by Whaley. She knew their position was now critical in the extreme. She must use all her wit and caution to guard her prize, yet satisfy Malvoney's requirements.

She knew that Malvoney was now watching her from the doorway, so she stirred and rubbed her eyes as if just awakening. He came forward and stood beside her.

"I haven't had time to tell you where we are going," he began. She raised herself and prepared to listen.

"We go aboard a cargo ship bound for the Azores," he informed. "They are short a wireless man. We will meet the vessel coming this way and you will be transferred to it. But you can't go on board as a woman; you must dress as a man and be a man to all appearances while you are there."

"I don't think I want to do that," she hesitated more from diplomacy than serious objection.

His heavy lips curled in a cruel smile. "You

are under orders," he reminded curtly. "Here is the uniform of a sailor; put it on and report to me."

Betty stood in silence and took the uniform from him. "Yes, I am under orders," she finally said. "I must do anything you wish." She was eager for action, but repressed her excitement, resuming her seat.

Malvoney took a pair of barber's clippers from his side pocket and ordered her to unpin her hair. It was bound around her head in a single braid.

"Oh, but you mustn't do that!" she cried out in real alarm. "I can't let you cut my hair. I will coil it under the cap, and no one will see."

"It has to be done," he snapped, "don't cry baby." His touch was brutal as he started the clippers in the middle of her forehead and with a dozen swift strokes bared her head. He flung the braid into her lap brutally. "Now get dressed quickly," he ordered, "we will be alongside before many minutes." He left the cabin and closed the door sharply behind him.

Betty passed her hand over her shorn head. For a moment the woman in her rebelled fiercely. She had loved her hair. Hot tears fell upon it.

Dorn had admired it, too, she recalled with fervor. Her hatred for Malvoney now burned more fiercely. The woman as well as the soldier was now in arms. Then she smiled bravely. Had she not consecrated her body and her life to her country's use, and this was only the first battle ground? She must be sensibly brave. She knew she was going to a plague ship whose capture was of the utmost importance, especially as it was going to take on the S. H. now being towed in the little vessel. The Government would give large sums for its discovery and destruction. What did her life of bodily safety count against such a prize? There was mighty incentive for bravery now.

She dressed herself in the blue uniform of a German sailor. She kissed the long braid of beautiful brown hair as she carefully placed it in her suit case with her clothing, but try as hard as she could, the hot tears again fell upon it. Then with uplifted head and brave heart she returned to face Malvoney. She submitted stoically to his scrutiny. She would pass very well for a petty officer.

"First give me that United States code book," he ordered. "I want to use it."

Without hesitation Betty procured the book from her baggage and handed it to him.

"From now on your name is to be Mark Whaley," he informed her. "Keep Whaley's baggage with you, and if searched, keep up the bluff. I do not anticipate any trouble, but if there is, I depend upon you. If you do your work right you'll get a large reward. If you don't — well — " His face darkened and Betty shivered inwardly.

She merely nodded her head and he contemplated her with a distorted smile. "Did you know that a serious accident happened to Whaley? He fell overboard and was drowned."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Betty in a shocked voice. Her white face reflected no pretense. His calloused indifference and the menace in his own words toward herself caused her stout heart to recoil.

"Yes, he lost his balance and must have sunk at once, poor devil." Then he turned abruptly to join Bishop, who was looking at Betty with appraising eyes.

Betty sat alone a long time watching the sun near the horizon and making plans. Before sundown they hove to and she saw near them a

long squat vessel. Out of the center of the hog-like back rose a little square house which she afterward learned was called the conning tower. The sea had gone down until there was little motion. This was exactly the condition Malvoney had prayed for. The little vessel they had in tow was drawn to the side of the hog-back stranger. Betty knew that the burlap-covered cases of S. H. were being transferred. This was accomplished with rapidity.

Just before dark Betty's suit cases with Whaley's and Malvoney's private baggage were loaded. When all were on board the great cargo submarine she felt a gradual rising of dread and uncertainty, but with a supreme effort stiffened herself to face the ordeal.

She sensed the full peril and menace of her position, the only woman among a crew of desperate German sailors, on board a plague ship with a red-lipped sensual beast claiming title to her soul. At that moment she thanked God that Dorn did not know of her plight. She would make no effort to help him locate her until she could relieve him of torturing anxiety concerning her fate. He would believe that her messages still came from South Carolina.

The cargo hold was closed and the men were so completely out of sight that the vessel seemed almost like an abandoned derelict. Presently a medium-sized man with prominent cheek bones appeared and bowed indifferently to her. He resembled Whaley some, without the hectic nose. She soon knew him as Captain Hans. He pointed to a low metal door in the steel box-like house on the back of the undersea vessel. Beside this door on a steel shelf was the wireless. She saw that no one was in charge of the instrument.

"That will be your room for the present," said the Captain. "You can be near the wireless there. If you need anything, call me." He spoke English without accent and his voice was not unkind. She concluded from the softening of his tone that he knew she was a woman, practically forced on board, mutilated and disguised as a man. Perhaps he, too, was a victim of circumstances.

"Thank you," she said quietly and entered the room. It evidenced some signs of having been prepared for her. It was lighted only by two electric bulbs and was immediately under the forward upper shell of the submarine. It

was hardly high enough for her to stand erect in; the highest place decreased like the sloping sides of a tent. She found a folding cot, wash stand, toilet and a small table with a steel stool. An odor warned her of recent fumigation, and a book still on the narrow shelf gave her the information that the room had been occupied by the first officer who she knew had died the day before with yellow fever. She soon learned that the adjoining room was the Captain's quarters and that back of the tower Malvoney shared the room of the second and third officers.

In a few moments a boy brought in a tray of food. Betty was hungry and ate with relish. But she soon became very warm as the little room was ventilated only by fan circulation. She also was eager to get out and report for work. So she left the tower and sought Captain Hans.

"The other operator will come on at eight and remain until midnight," he informed her, "then you come on and stand a six hour watch."

"If he is tired I don't mind going on at once," she offered.

"He has been off for six hours now and is ready. We have been without an operator since

two o'clock as we had only one until you came aboard."

She stood at his side as he scanned the sea from the center of the tower in all directions. "We are short-handed all around," he went on, "and I have to stand an eight hour watch myself in order not to overwork my officers. There are only three of us now."

Betty shuddered. She knew that his men had been dying of yellow fever. She did not know how many had died that day, but if six and the officer had gone the day before, that surely meant more had succumbed today. She wondered what her chances were.

"You better turn in and get all the sleep you can before midnight," the Captain suggested. "The night watches are pretty tiresome until you get used to them."

"All right, Captain," she agreed. "Will I be called or am I expected to get up myself?"

"You will be called," he assured her; "do not fear oversleeping. I remain on watch myself till then."

She passed back through the narrow door to her room and let down the folding cot. She noticed that it was furnished with new blankets.

Although she did not relish sleeping where death had so recently occurred from the malignant disease she refused wisely to dwell on this danger and prepared to sleep as much as possible until midnight. She soon heard the wireless working and knew the operator had returned. She could hear distinctly everything that was going on and understood his call for a shore station.

After a long tiresome effort the station answered and as the operator used highest voltage on his instruments she inferred that the station was some distance away. His message was in the code Malvoney had used.

She was able to read most of the figures and was sure he reported only two deaths that day. Then followed details of receiving freight and a wireless operator.

Betty fell asleep as she listened and was wakened about eleven thirty. She bathed her face and was about to report for duty when a sailor tapped on her door and handed her steaming coffee and rolls.

After eating she went out into the dark conning tower and was greeted pleasantly by the Captain still on watch. She could see a dim outline of

the operator sitting on a steel stool in front of the instrument.

"I think he's gone to sleep," Captain Hans said with real consideration. "The last thirty hours alone at the instrument with only six hours' rest have been heavy. Shake him a little."

Betty did as requested a little timidly, but received no response. The Captain grasped the man's shoulders more insistently and the operator instead of waking fell heavily to the floor. He was dead. The fever had claimed another victim.

"You go back into your room for a while," commanded the Captain, and Betty was glad to obey.

She was white and shaken. She must resume the work of a man who had just died with the dreaded plague. There was every chance for infection. But again the thought of Dorn stiffened her. She must go through it, of course, just as he had gone through, and was still going.

With a shudder she heard in a few minutes the body dropped heavily into the sea.

Chapter Twenty-six

DORN, AFTER THE FIRST BUSY hours of getting away with the great transport, "Adze," soon began to realize all the material advantages of his commission. As an officer he was entitled to the best room and association at mess with the commissioned men. This, in his weakened condition, he doubly appreciated.

To ride on this great power plant, to feel its sway and vibration, was a tonic in itself. The terrific speed of the "Adze" served as a lotion to his nerves. This transport, in addition to being equipped with everything a destroyer needed, had on the end of her blade cutwater a powerful ram. This, with her speed of twice any similar craft, made her a veritable swordfish. In addition she carried a heavy gun and depth bombs charged with fifty pounds of new super-explosive.

Dorn was told that the new explosive was called S. H. for short. He smiled strangely as

they, in innocence of his knowledge, gave him its history, with certain embellishments from their own imagination concerning its awesome qualities. He met the men only at meal times, as during the rest of the day he was obliged to stay with his instruments, so they saw little of him.

On his second day aboard he received Betty's message concerning the cargo submarine coming north. He was tremendously moved, both with delight to hear from her, and with excitement at the possibilities now before them. The fighting virus in his blood took fire, and it was only with great effort that he quelled his desire for quick action in order that his judgment might be reliable. He was finishing this inward fight with himself when Lieutenant Worth in command came into the wireless room.

"We are headed for the Azores, as I understand it, Lieutenant?" said Dorn.

"Yes, barring accidents and bad weather we ought to be there in sixty hours," Worth replied, dropping into a seat across the narrow table.

"Do we call there?"

"Not unless something happens to make it necessary. But it is Portuguese, you know.

The big ship back there has really had no try-out since being repaired of damages done by the Huns at the dock, and it could easily transpire that something would run hot or need adjustment by the time we get there. Why do you ask?"

"I have been getting wireless information from the south that may develop into something important, but I can't tell yet. How long would a fifteen or eighteen knot boat take to come from a point near Charleston to the Azores?"

Worth made a rapid mental calculation. "She would get here about a day behind us with equally good luck," he replied.

"How long will it take us to reach our objective in France from the Azores?"

"About two days if we do not have to leave our course for the Hun. This is the fourth trip I have made as part of a convoy. I am getting used to it. There really is only one bad place after we leave the Azores and that is where we cross the path into the Mediterranean."

Dorn was thinking fast. "Do you suppose we could get detached from this convoy if the need were urgent?"

"Nothing is impossible as long as we can reach Washington with our radio. But it would have to be something big. You see, Dorn, there are over ten thousand souls between the steel sides of that ship. She was the pride of the Huns before we took her and put her into shape to carry troops. If anything should happen to her every Hun by birth or by nature would sing his hellish hymn of hate. But what's on your mind, can't you tell me?"

"Pardon me if I appear secretive, but I have nothing definite yet. I'll tell you as soon as there is anything tangible."

"When is it apt to develop?"

"I can only speculate on that, but I know I can depend on you to back up any possible request I make to Washington to be detached for special duty." Dorn looked at Lieutenant Worth with a square, searching scrutiny.

"To the last rivet of this speedster, and she is the fastest boat in the world," replied Worth, grimly.

"Then I'll want to talk it over with you as soon as I have positive information."

Worth nodded and left the wireless room.

That afternoon and evening Dorn tried several

times to get some response from Betty, but was unable to raise her. The next morning he tried again, with better results.

"Ship's health bad," she reported. "Second and third officers went last night with plague. Driving hard for Azores. May be in position to offer more details tomorrow."

Dorn was unable to learn where Betty was. He had no hint that she, herself, was on board this plague ship. He believed that she still was on duty at an illicit land station receiving reports from the submarine. He knew she was using a wide range station, but he was now bothered by the possibility of passing out of her radio circle.

He telephoned to Lieutenant Worth, whose quarters were aft. The officer came to him at once.

"I have more news from the south this morning," Dorn informed him. "Yesterday's suspicions have developed into more clear-cut information." Dorn then proceeded to outline the entire situation. As he talked the lieutenant leaned forward across the instrument table, alert and tensely interested. "And now," ended Dorn, "at Charleston, or some fifty or sixty miles

abreast of that point, 1960 cases of S. H. were transferred to this boat I know as 'Merb' Can you figure how much behind us she will arrive in the vicinity of the Azores?"

"Let me see — " Worth drew two converging lines with his pencil and made the nautical positions. "She will be behind us from thirty-six to forty-eight hours."

"How long would it take us to finish our convoy work and return to the Azores, if we had the orders?"

"If we were relieved the moment we arrived in France and returned at full speed, we would be back in three or four days."

"Then, if the 'Merb' had to stop at the Azores two days to get an officer or two, we could return here before she could get away?"

"Yes, I think that's good reasoning. But, of course, we could tell more definitely tomorrow," he added. "When will you get another radio report concerning the German sub?"

"Probably not before tomorrow. I suppose you know that the big ship behind us has been reporting engine trouble to Washington?"

"Yes, a crank pin is running hot. I suppose that was one of the new parts supplied at the

repair works. But I don't imagine they'll be likely to stop for that."

"A crank pin can make a lot of trouble when it starts going bad," reminded Dorn.

"We won't let anything leak out about this sub," cautioned Worth as he rose. "We must have that snake, and single-handed, too, Lieutenant. Don't give those other fellows a chance to get in on the hat. We've got the latest bombs and the speed of an airship. If we get within sight of the sub we will either sink him or get him."

The remainder of the day brought no more news from the "Merb." But it developed that the big ship's trouble was not abating, and worse, one of her pumps was making protests against conditions. Dorn was not surprised when next morning she came to anchor in the open roadstead at the Azores with the three escorting destroyers moving with low speed in a circle around her.

Dorn had managed to sleep most of the time since midnight, but was now so busy that he had to have his breakfast sent to him. While he was eating Lieutenant Worth came in, anxious and expectant.

"How long do you suppose we'll have to stay in this hell?" Worth grumbled. "I figured on getting this troop ship into France and getting a roving commission to come back and look for the Hun who now thinks his nose is out of danger."

"The chief engineer reports a burnt-out crank pin. He says the box must be scraped before he can proceed. That will require, with the difficult packing of the pump, perhaps forty-eight hours, maybe sixty," calculated Dorn.

"Nothing more from the south?" Worth asked.

Dorn shook his head.

"But I may hear any moment. Who must we go to for authority to leave?"

"No one as long as the troop ship is at anchor. Two destroyers circling her will be adequate protection. I am the ranking officer and the ranking ship. I will board the troop vessel now and find out directly from the Captain just what the outlook is."

After Worth had gone Dorn sat and looked at the wireless as if he would conjure it into immediate activity. Every nerve was a-tingle with the prospect of getting his man. Dorn did not think of the "Merb" as a prize, yielding

him money. He wanted only that explosive and the red-lipped dog on board.

He sat, keenly alert, waiting for Betty's promised message. When it came he recognized instantly her peculiar touch that he would know among thousands. His heart rushed out to meet her across the space that divided.

They both responded to the signal, then followed the longitude and latitude of the "Merb." "Moving under tremendous pressure for the Azores," Betty reported. "Captain only man left to navigate. Plague claimed all the officers and more than half the crew. I can likely report several times a day now, obstructions removed, but must cut off now."

Dorn's delight would have been seriously tempered with misgivings had he known that Betty was on board the plague ship. But he still believed her on land keeping in touch with the "Merb's" movements by means of the wireless.

At that moment Worth came briskly into the room.

"Lieutenant Dorn," he began, "that ship's mechanic has a big job ahead of him; two and a half days at least will be required before she can sail. Have you heard anything from the south?"

"Yes, just finished. She reports latitude and longitude and coming this way under all possible engine pressure to get officers to relieve the captain, the only officer survivor. There is the message written out."

"But Good God, man, she now is within twenty-four hours of here, and at the rate she is coming we can get her sure! It can't be true, it seems too good! Dorn, she is ours!"

"But remember, Worth," cautioned Dorn gravely, "we must make no mistake. A single act in the next twenty-four hours may even turn the tide of war."

Chapter Twenty-seven

AT NOON DORN AGAIN RECEIVED Betty's call. She reported no change. "Ample fuel and engine crew not affected by plague," she informed. "But ship in many other ways neglected through lack of crew. Officers' quarters fumigated every six hours. Should reach Azores early tomorrow. Plan is to go to channel — between islands. Will send Malvoney ashore, then submerge and lie on the bottom until he returns with officers and men procured from a secret agent there. More men absolutely necessary to work her through the English Channel, where they must run submerged. Nothing more before eight tonight," she ended.

Again Dorn believed that she was signalling from the illicit land station, from which point she was keeping in touch with the German submarine. Had he known her real position, his fears would have become unbearable.

He at once telephoned Lieutenant Worth, who came immediately to the wireless room.

"She is making record time," greeted Dorn, "and with no accidents will make the islands tomorrow. She will hide between islands in the channel. They will let Malvoney ashore to reach the agent and the vessel will lay on the bottom until he returns with the men."

"And so they have an agent here? How the Portuguese would grimace at that! By Heavens, when they get hold of that combination the man Malvoney and the agent will see the next sunrise in hell. Just think of a wireless station in Charleston, in a town of seventy-five thousand red-blooded patriotic people, being allowed to send messages to us here. How I would like to handle the knife that would cut out such a rotten spot!"

"But let's get down to tacks," reminded Dorn. "Shall we go and meet her and attempt her capture at sea, or shall we let her come on here? What we want to figure on is a trap for the Hun, his cargo and his snakes aboard, bearing in mind that they have fifty tons of explosive that is urgently needed. Also, do you realize that one shot from us might set off that fearful stuff?

What would be left of the vessel were it exploded, or what would be left of us, even deep in the water as we are, and two or three miles away? We mustn't forget also that it is a plague ship in which more than half the officers and crew have dropped dead with the vilest and most contagious disease. We've got to do some thinking, Worth. It seems as if we were up against it whichever way we handle the trap. Are you willing, personally, to go into it?"

"A thousand times yes. I'm right with you, Dorn," shouted Worth. "Shouldn't think you'd have to ask that."

Dorn's hand shot out in contrition and the men's rich brave blood tingled at the hand grip.

"She'll surely be coming right this way," said Dorn. "I'll get news from her again after eight tonight; we'd better just wait."

"Yes, nothing could be gained by checking her now. I'll be back as soon as I have time to study a chart of the islands," he said, as he rose to leave.

At eight o'clock Dorn sat waiting for the transmitter to bring him the message which would come freighted with important news.

During the afternoon Lieutenant Worth had spent much time locating the spot where the "Merb" would be most likely to land a man and then submerge. The tides were studied also for the possibilities of a hiding-place where they could await the coming of the German submarine. They evolved several plans, hoping that one of them would fit the exact time, place, and condition of the enemy's arrival.

At 8.15 Betty's stroke came on Dorn's sounder. "Still sailing full ahead," she reported. "Longitude — latitude — time ship's clock — Plague abated. One more sailor died today, but no more threatened. Wireless operator giving way some under strain of overwork, but it may be fever. If so no more reports, as the disease develops in a few hours. Striving to arrive at selected rendezvous between islands designated before daybreak tomorrow. Will submerge as soon as Malvoney goes ashore. S. H. is aboard, valuable cargo. She sails with little more than conning tower exposed. This is not a vulnerable spot, as the ship seals below that watertight. Remember the plague. Remember the S. H."

At this point her instrument seemed gradually to leave his tuning, and although her message

came to a distinct end it seemed to have been extinguished from the weight of something indefinable to Dorn. All further attempts to raise her during the night were fruitless. He still believed her to be on the coast of Charleston, when in reality she was coming directly toward him, less than twelve hours away.

During the day messages from a station in France warned of the operations of an enemy submarine as far south as the Azores, where the great troop ship lay, now perfectly helpless, but with her three destroyers, including the "Adze," circling round her.

Just before midnight, to Dorn's relief, Lieutenant Worth reported that a British destroyer was to take their place in the circular patrol, this leaving them free to trail the "Merb."

The next morning the "Adze" was anchored behind the island, nearest to the point where the plague-infested submarine must come to get the necessary depth of water to submerge. Dorn and Worth were stationed at the home of a British subject on the highest part of the island. They were thus able to get a perfect view of the sea approaching west and south. As the first rays of the sun came from the east behind them

they scoured the sea with glasses for the sight of the approaching vessel.

"I believe I can see her!" Worth finally cried out in excitement.

"I see something, too," shouted Dorn, "but it seems little more than a disappearing shadow."

"Watch that shadow, Dorn. Can't you see it roll in the sea? As sure as we live, it's the sub. She is running as low as possible. Can't you make her out?"

"Yes, I believe I can see her!" cried Dorn. "But there's damned little to shoot at; she's all but submerged now. What do you propose?"

Worth lowered his glasses. He could see the dark spot now with his naked eye. "I can see but one thing to do, Dorn, and that is to run her down if she don't stop as expected. Then demand a surrender. She must fight or submerge. Then we'll give her a bomb."

"And you know a bomb will open her up and put us in the clouds, too," reminded Dorn gravely.

"I know it perfectly, but that cargo of explosive must never leave this spot, even if we, and the sea, and these islands disappear in dust or vapor. Let's hurry aboard. We haven't a moment to waste."

The launch joined the "Adze," which raised her anchor and came round the little island like a greyhound round a bush. Her speed was so great that her tail wave was as high as a breaker.

They came in sight of the "Merb" as she was slowing up and had broken out a hole to release an anchor. The submarine instantly realized her danger. Like the outlaw she was, she prepared to dive.

"Better send a shot over him," said Worth, standing with Dorn just in front of the steering wheel. The signal was barely given before a shell went with suppressed screeching over the German submarine.

The "Merb" began to submerge out of sight. The souls of the watching men began to sink with it. They knew if it dived destruction was sure to come to them all. But nothing daunted, the "Adze" rushed on to be sure and cover the spot so that the German could be successfully bombed.

"But, Good God!" cried Worth, grabbing Dorn's arm, "there's something wrong with her. She can't dive. She is bringing out her gun. Now we've got her. She'll have to fight or surrender, and with that pop gun she can

shoot at us all day going at the speed we go. I'm sure she can't submerge, or she would before this. And if she has a gunner he is surely crippled or we would have been dodging shells. We are now within a thousand yards of them and must keep that far off until they speak."

The "Adze" slowed up like a runabout with brakes suddenly applied and began a careful detour, keeping a distance of one thousand yards. They saw the disappearing gun rise from the long, black body of the immense tapering log. The shell was slipped into position with the breech lock closed. The gunner took deliberate aim to get their range. There was a flash. The man behind the gun plunged into the sea, but no shell came toward them.

"Great Heavens, Dorn," cried Worth, "did you see that? She not only is unable to submerge, but the breech lock of the gun also has failed. Don't you see! She can't move! She is ours, she is done for, damn her! Now, let's see what next!"

He turned to his gunner. "Can you lift that cannon they have just raised? There may be some trick."

"I think so."

"Try it, but for the life of you, if you miss, shoot over her and not under."

"We better come to a dead stop, sir, to be sure," the gunner suggested.

Dorn saw Worth give the signal to come to a stand. This order was obeyed so effectively that they retained their footing with difficulty. The gunner waited until his aim was steady; then his gun shouted. Their eyes could follow the shell as it traveled true to its mark and the gun and carriage was carried over its crowning deck.

"If that's the best bluff she can put up," grinned Worth, "she must be in a pretty tight box."

"What next?" said Dorn. He appeared stoical, but in reality his heart was beating furiously.

"Perhaps he has another deuce in his hand," said Worth.

"Then he'll have to play it mighty quick."

"Yes, there it is. It's the white flag." They all could see it as it began to float.

"Some trick as sure as hell," exclaimed Worth, but his face changed as a weakly sailor came to the side and affixed the sign that all must regard, the yellow flag of the dreaded plague.

Chapter Twenty-eight

"STILL, I BELIEVE HE'S GETTING ready to trick us," declared Worth as they watched the yellow signal. "There he goes forward to drop his anchor. Now, what next?"

"I believe he may sink her after he gets off in the boat. As a merchant ship, not a navy vessel, his owner is insured and will be paid in case of capture, as well as if sunk."

"But there are German spies on board."

"Yes, if they haven't gone with the plague. It's an oil-burning craft and her whole crew didn't total more than twenty men. Half of them are dead and those who are living believe it is only a matter of time, anyhow. They might as well go one way as another."

"Yes, Dorn," commented Worth, "but I have seen snakes strike a fatal blow with their last wriggle. He won't use the explosive unless

he wants to commit suicide, but we must have some one on board that craft soon."

"It should be an engineer," suggested Dorn, "who can disconnect both the engine and the pump that supplies the boilers. What would happen if you asked for volunteers among your men?"

"Let's try and see," smiled Worth, as if sure of the result. He had the engine room men called forward outside the wireless room.

"Men," he began, "some one must go aboard that German sub and disconnect her engines and pumps. She is loaded with valuable cargo. Your interest in the prize will be big, likely very big, if no mistake is made. She also has fifty tons of explosive aboard that even at this distance would put us out of business if it was let off. In addition to that it is a plague ship. More than half its crew have died with yellow fever within the last four days. Whoever goes aboard should be able to wigwag information. He must stay there or be isolated in quarantine for at least ten days. It is a risky undertaking, consider well. I am asking for volunteers."

Every hand went up.

"All right! Fine! Patchen, you go. Get

everything together and a boat over the side as soon as possible, and come to me for final instructions. You must take food, water, and extra clothing! Eat or drink nothing found there."

As the man went to obey orders Worth turned to Dorn. "He is a fireman but should be an engineer. I can't spare engineers. Our work ahead is too important. But we will soon know what's inside her."

In a few moments Patchen left the destroyer and approached the plague-ridden submarine without hindrance.

"I told him to signal as soon as he had a chance to look around," explained Worth. They watched every sign with their glasses. "Here's where I get ahead of you. I can't read that jolty stuff you got down there in your place, but I can read this." He jerked his head toward Patchen, who now appeared on the crown of the "Merb" and commenced to wigwag his message with flags.

"No resistance," Worth began to read aloud; "four in bed recovering from fever. Two exhausted from overwork. Three in officers' quarters,—Captain Hans, Malvoney, and Mark Whaley."

Dorn stiffened at the thought that Malvoney and his dupe were now in his hands.

Patchen was still signalling. "Big cargo of zink, copper, and rubber, also explosive."

"Hurrah!" shouted Worth. "Some prize that! Wouldn't it be a good idea to work it down about three miles? There can be no doubt as to our title to the prize now. If we can get it down under that Portuguese fort they would protect it until it could be removed, in case we had to leave."

"Fine idea!" approved Dorn. "Let's try that."

Instructions were wigwagged to Patchen.

In a short time the "Merb" slowly raised her anchor to the water line and slowly followed the "Adze" along the south side of the island to a little bay of deep and well-protected water, under an antiquated fort and a garrison. The "Merb" was now so close to the shore that shortest-range guns from the fort could reach her. There were only sixteen feet of water in low tide, and if the Huns were able to scuttle her, the cargo would not suffer much.

On the way down Dorn managed to raise the garrison by wireless. He told them that they were bringing in a German prize with plague

aboard and asked the protection of the fort. He received immediate assurance that guns would be trained on the submarine and that it would be carefully watched that none left it to carry the disease.

The "Adze" then took a position two thousand feet away and anchored.

In about an hour Patchen again signalled that he had disconnected the pump and engines and would bring the parts to a nearby barren coral island just sticking above the water, where they could get them after he left them fumigated to prevent possible infection.

"I knew that boy had horse sense," declared Worth. "He figured that they might try to overpower him, replace the parts, and try to get away."

"We better report details to Washington," said Dorn.

"Have you juice enough for that?"

"I think so. You go get your message into cipher and I will see if the engineer can give me extra current while we are at anchor."

It took two hours to get the report to Washington with a request for instructions. After another hour came back brief orders.

"Complete convoy to France," Dorn read, "thence to Gulf of Mexico to discover and destroy station. Have crew of "Merb" brought to Atlantic port. Leaders treated as spies."

Worth grabbed Dorn's hand and shook it. "Lucky was the day that threw us together," he exclaimed. "I felt from the start that you were a mascot. We have won hands down. She is at anchor all whole, under the guns of the fort, and her machinery parted so she can't move."

Dorn did not reply at once. His thoughts were reaching out toward an illicit wireless station at Charleston. As soon as the enthusiastic lieutenant had left him he began to call, hoping to reach Betty. His efforts were fruitless, because she was less than two thousand feet away, but with engines dead, making her wireless mute.

Shortly after noon Patchen wigwagged that he was taking a letter to the rock island where he had left the engine parts and asked them to send for it. After getting the paper carefully fumigated Dorn and Lieutenant Worth examined it with interest.

"Was afraid to wigwag," wrote Patchen, "as I think Malvoney may be able to read the signs.

He and the captain spend their time together in the officers' quarters. Believe officers and Malvoney are planning to escape in my boat alongside. A sailor is acting as first officer; the rest died of fever. Some of the crew evidently burned the submerging valve stem off with acid, and in the same way put out the breech lock of the gun. That was why she couldn't submerge or fire. Send written instructions, as I can't prevent Malvoney from reading signs."

"That's pretty good for a fireman, isn't it?" approved Worth. "I'll have to get that man promoted sure, if he gets safe out of this. Do you think he has it sized up right and that Malvoney means to try to escape?"

"If he does he'll get into something worse."

"Yes, this is a Portuguese possession," commented Worth, "and I have heard they have adopted a real live-wire, snappy method of getting rid of their prisoners and spies, giving their government always the benefit of the doubt."

"But these fellows have an agent there, or they wouldn't risk it."

"Yes, and if they get to land maybe they'll manage to escape; yet I doubt it."

"Your idea, then, is that if they want to escape to let them."

"I think we'd feel safer about that sub and her cargo if those snakes were off. We can't take them aboard here and we can't ask the Portuguese to allow us to land them, on account of the plague. But if they escaped — well — that would make a big difference in the reception they would get if discovered. They would be plain spies from a plague ship."

"But I'd like to get two of these snakes back into the mountains," protested Dorn.

"If you had them back in the States and had them convicted, what would they get under the law as we now run it? Two or three years in the Pen and a small fine."

"But suppose they get ashore with the help of a confederate and finally get away?"

"Let's consider how it does really look," figured Worth. "First, they will not attempt anything until after dark, because they know that the guns of the fort as well as our own are trained upon them every minute. Now, suppose Patchen gets busy down below and lets them escape after dark, don't you know that with our new device we can hear the first step they

take into the boat as distinctly as if they were right beneath us? And more, you have the wireless communication with the garrison. You could advise them they were escaping, and in what direction. And, Dorn, I am willing to admit I really like the way the Portuguese handle spies and alien enemies. Of course, if they stay aboard until they die or get the plague out of their clothes, then it is up to Uncle Sam."

At this moment Dorn held up his hand to stay the lieutenant's speech while he copied from the wireless that began to operate from a powerful sending station. "Halifax is working with the Irish station," he explained under his breath, "and is relaying a Washington message from the state department to London." He took the message down in code.

"Worth," he cried out, after studying his code book, "you — we — are famous men. The capture of this sub is regarded as one of the important occurrences of the war. Our names will appear at the head of the column in every newspaper in the United States and allied countries."

"I knew it," cried Worth. "I knew when you came aboard you were a mascot. Haven't I said so, right along! And that prize, my

boy, you and I and the crew get it all. I bet it'll be a whopping big one, too."

Dorn suddenly became sober. "Yet, Lieutenant Worth," he reminded, "but little credit really is ours. The credit of this capture belongs to the source of our information. We couldn't have found her, or known of her existence, without that."

"That's so," considered Worth. "But you've been pretty tight about that source of information. I began to think it was something you wanted to keep to yourself."

"I have every reason to believe that my information leading to the capture of this boat was sent me from an illicit station at Charleston, by an operator who went there with the knowledge of the Government, and for patriotic purposes. That operator is a young woman, Betty Fraser, with whom I worked closely in the mountains."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" cried Worth. "She shall share with us both the honor and the prize." He rose to reach across the table and grip Dorn's hand. "A romance, as I live! That crowns the whole thing with added glory for me." He laughed like a boy.

"But," broke in Dorn, "I am disturbed by another bit of information I caught on the wireless. It is added that the illicit station at Charleston had no operator when it was discovered and destroyed by the Government. Something may have happened to Miss Fraser."

"She undoubtedly had ample protection and credentials," soothed Worth, "and will report as soon as she can, fully. I've got to go now and take some observations, but will be back before long." He rose and backed out of the narrow door.

That evening Dorn sat with Worth at the instruments listening for any movement of the submarine. The water on that side of the island was calm as a pond. The gunners changed watch and stood faithfully by. The powerful searchlight of the "Adze" was tested and right.

An hour passed and both Dorn and Lieutenant Worth wondered if Patchen had been right in his suspicions that Malvoney intended to escape. Dorn left the wireless room and went to the table where the audophone or detector was installed. He signalled for Worth to listen at the additional receiver. They stood motionless for a while, then suddenly Dorn raised his hand.

"They've started," he cried; "they are cautiously putting baggage, or something, into a boat." Their movements were as audible as though only a few feet away. "Now they are getting in the boat themselves. There are three of them."

They could hear them shove the boat carefully away from the submarine and adjust the oars in the locks. They began to row with extreme caution, but as they got some distance from the submarine "Merb" they commenced to row swiftly.

Dorn ran to his instrument, called the garrison, and gave them the information; then returned to listen.

The escaping boat finally was heard to grind its keel in the gravel of the abrupt bottom of the shore, where they cautiously approached. They evidently were handing out the bags they seemed loath to leave behind, though safety would have dictated otherwise. Then, as the third man stepped out of the boat and gave it a shove back into the water, the powerful searchlight of the "Adze" broke out and fell on the three escaping men. Its glare blinded them and they protected their eyes with their hands. The

rifles of the Portuguese soldiers were pointed at them. The searchlight followed them until they entered an old adobe building used as an isolation quarters or quarantine.

"Now, by Heaven, Dorn," said Worth, "there is nothing left on our prize but Patchen and the sick sailors."

In an other hour the garrison called Dorn to inform them that a drumhead court was in session, trying the three German spies. They wanted to know if any one there could identify the leader. Dorn replied that he could.

"Is there any one there who can administer the oath to you?"

"I'll see," Dorn replied and telephoned Worth to come to his room.

"Can you administer an oath to me?" he asked. "A court is already in session trying the German spies."

Worth's face was illuminated. "That's what I call decent kind of service," he approved. "Sure, I have power to administer the oath. Tell 'em so, and get it over quickly."

Dorn informed the garrison operator that he could take oath from his officer in command and the formality was carried out.

"Describe the leader," came from the garrison.

"About five feet eight, heavy girth, no beard when last seen. Swarthy, with a wound or fresh scar in the center of his forehead."

"You believe him to be a German spy? His right name as shown by his papers is Von Spiel."

"Yes."

"The judge advocate wishes to thank you, and will not trouble you farther. Having made sure of the leader's identity, he finds plenty of evidence to convict the other two."

"Now you watch what will happen," said Worth enthusiastically. "They sure have horse sense here. They don't want any more snakes on their island."

Dorn listened while the garrison operator called to give him a short message which he wrote carefully. He handed the paper gravely to Lieutenant Worth.

"Prisoners guilty," was the verdict. "Sentenced to be shot at sunrise."

Chapter Twenty-nine

"WELL, AT LEAST TWO CLOCKS that have been ticking bad time for us will stop this morning," said Worth. "This is just what should happen at home, and if the war continues, must happen of necessity."

"I guess you're right." Dorn stretched himself backward in his chair, clasping his hands together on his head.

"Excuse me if I digress," laughed Worth, "but with your wings spread like that and with the grimness of your soul, you remind me of our national emblem."

Dorn laughed boyishly. "Your remark takes me back twenty-five years or so; my West Virginian nickname was 'Eagle Bill'; I expect it was given me because of my nosepiece."

"But to return to more unpleasant subjects," said Worth. "These people who know Germans better than we do show us speed and efficiency

in trying spies we can well copy. No foolish sentiment, they get rid of them quick."

"That Malvoney deserved death I will agree," said Dorn, "but that Whaley, merely a weak rummy dupe for Malvoney, should be shot, is still a question. And so far as we know this captain may not have done anything more serious than obey Malvoney's orders, but landing as they did on the grounds of a fort settles it. I tell you, Worth, there is a great chance for injustice in these midnight procedures."

"Innocent people will sometimes suffer, but what is one life or a dozen, if by being martyred they save the lives of millions of fighting men who in the last analysis are martyrs too?"

"Yet," insisted Dorn gravely, "I feel I would like to prevent the execution. I am not hardened yet, also a further unpleasant duty I have concluded I must perform."

"What's that?" quickly asked Worth.

"I want the personal effects of those men, if they will let us have them. I am hoping they will reveal the location of the submarine base, and that they also will unravel the mystery of the disappearance of the explosive from the mountain mill."

"But how about the chances of infection of our crew by bringing that stuff aboard here?"

"Haven't you a small room where we can fumigate thoroughly before handling? We must have that baggage if it is possible to coax it from the garrison and make it fairly safe."

"Yes, we've got a place and a dope that will make it perfectly safe to handle. Yet even if it didn't, we are in the game of war where grave risks greet us every minute. Go ahead and get it if you can. By the way, don't forget our wireless; the transport is having better luck, and might be able to get away tomorrow morning," he added as he rose and approached the door.

"I am glad of it," said Dorn. As the Lieutenant left the room he reached for his key and called the garrison. They were alert and replied at once. He made his request and received the immediate reply as translated by the garrison operator.

"The judge advocate and commandant are sorry that you have been obliged to request this baggage, which is now in the hands of the priests who are attending the condemned men. We recognize its great value to you and were prepared

to send it to you, but other details have prevented. We will do so at once. Again we ask your pardon."

Dorn went out and began a pace of the narrow deck that lasted for hours. The semitropical air was a delight to his lungs. About the garrison he saw lights moving swiftly, foretelling the tragedy that was about to take place. At the first approach of dawn he could hear a boat approaching, doubtless with the baggage referred to. He previously had made sure that the sealed apartment to be used for fumigating was ready to receive the bags. Dorn watched the approaching boat and now could plainly see the suitcases and bags. Each was bound with heavy cord and sealed with the stamp of the Portuguese Government.

Worth was asleep.

Dorn called a wardroom boy and gave careful directions. "Put it away at once," he ordered, "and be sure you wash your hands in germicide when you are through."

Dismissing that as settled for a time he began again to pace the deck, going into the wireless room frequently to see if there were any new messages.

Daylight was quite distinct when he went to his instrument and found that the transport's operator was calling. He gave Dorn the information that they would be able to sail in two hours and directed him to rejoin the convoy. Dorn called Worth on the telephone and repeated the message, then started back on deck into the morning air that invigorated him after a restless sleepless night. Just as he came on deck he heard a rifle volley boom over the garrison. He started and stood still, then another volley came across the water with a distinctness that made his own heart flinch. As he resumed his pacing the third volley resounded. Dorn knew that the Republic of Portugal had performed what it believed to be its duty to themselves and the Allies.

Soon Worth came on deck to read a letter of instructions to Patchen, advising him what he must do on board the "Merb" until they could send further orders. He left this on the rock. A short time after sunrise their anchor came to the water's edge as they got underway. The "Adze" responded to her powerful engines with precision and majesty and proceeded to take her place at the head of the diamond-shaped convoy.

Every eye was now alert for submarines as they headed for the coast of France into the most dangerous zone in the Atlantic. Lookout watches were doubled and every officer not asleep was scanning the sea first with glass and then with naked eye for those scorpions that would sting to death the ten thousand fighting men in the mass of steel bowling over thirty miles an hour behind them.

When the convoy had setted down to a routine Dorn went to bed and slept a few hours, all that was allowed anyone while passing through the submarine infested zone. When he awoke he believed it now would be safe to investigate the baggage of Malvoney and his executed confederates. He was eager to wring from it the secrets of the German snakes.

He waited impatiently for the boy to bring the suitcases to him and settled down to examine each detail carefully. The first bag he opened proved to be Whaley's. He broke the seals, but it contained nothing to attract his attention. The next case he opened evidently had belonged to the captain. The smallest detail was examined. He wanted to locate the place where the cargo was taken on board and if possible to

find information concerning the submarine base. He found important looking documents, but they were written in German. These he put to one side for further interpretation. Nothing else brought any light upon his problem. He carefully restored the contents, intending to go over it all again with Lieutenant Worth later.

The next piece nearest his hand was a substantial twenty-four inch suitcase which was undoubtedly of American make. When he finally released the lid and the case lay open before him he felt as though struck by the fearful explosion of a torpedo. His heart leaped, then sank with a fearful apprehension.

"My God!" he cried, "this is Betty Fraser's bag, her clothes, her papers!" With shaking hand he lifted one after another of the well remembered things. Then with a choking breath and a pain in his heart like a dagger thrust he lifted the great braid of brown hair.

The ghastly truth came to him with staggering force. She had been dressed as a sailor on board that plague ship and had been forced to leave with Malvoney and Captain Hans. And one of the shots he heard that morning had sent lead into her heart. She was dead — dead

mostly through his own activity, dead a martyr to her country. He grasped his head with both hands and tried to figure it out. She had not been at Charleston after that first day, then. She had been on board that German submarine, signalling him from hell. He blamed himself over and over. Surely he should have known, he should have realized she was the kind of girl who would take a chance like that, and leave him in ignorance of her peril.

Here was all the evidence he needed that she had been executed, hastily, without evidence or proof of her guilt. He understood now why his heart had burned in rebellion at the hasty action, why he had recoiled when he heard the shot. Surely Betty's plea had been going out to him across the space, and he had not lifted a finger.

His body and brain seemed to take fire with the unbearable agony of his self-conviction. He rushed to the end of his narrow room and flung open the ventilator. He fell into his chair half unconscious, unmindful of the persistent call of his wireless and of Lieutenant Worth's repeated signal on the telephone. In weakness he leaned his weight on the table, his soul consumed with agony and remorse.

It was thus that Worth found him an hour later. The Lieutenant's eyes took in the situation at a glance. His gaze darted from the open bag to the woman's clothes and the brown braid lying pathetically across Dorn's knees. Instantly he realized the truth.

His hand went to Dorn's shoulder and his voice was low. "What have you found, old man?" he said gently, "tell me."

Dorn staggered to his feet, holding the long braid in his trembling hands. He went forward to where the blast of fresh air was rushing in through the window.

"I don't believe I can tell you," he cried out, "for I can hardly tell myself. It seems like a horrible dream. It can't be true. But here are Betty Fraser's clothes, her letters, her diary, her hair. While I thought her safe in Charleston she was undergoing unutterable things on that plague ship. Oh, we shouldn't have let her come. She shouldn't have touched this devilish business. She was shot as a spy with those damned snakes, she — the squarest woman God ever made!" His voice broke and he paced up and down the narrow room. Worth stood silent,

unable to check or even to comprehend Dorn's passion of grief.

"But a thing like that couldn't be true, Worth," he went on helplessly, "it just couldn't." His eyes were closed tightly as if to blind himself from the truth. "Yet we saw her go, we heard her shot, and here is her bag." Then he broke off with a sudden conviction. "I've got to go back, Worth. I've got to know how it happened. I can't go on and leave even her body there, the body I ordered shot."

"Dorn, old man," reminded Worth gently, "pull yourself together. You are talking wildly. You know that we can't go back. We're under strict orders, you and I both. We have definite instructions to find that submarine base as soon as we leave France. Our course will take us far from the Azores. Why, we, too, would deserve to be shot, if we did a thing like that at such a time as this. We are sailing under orders. Think man! And," he added, with his voice lowered, "wouldn't she want you to go forward, just as she did, with all that was in you, right to the end? Would she want you to go back, to undo all that she died for?"

At his words Dorn's madness left him.

"Thanks!" he said simply, "that was what I needed. Yes, she would want me to go on. But some day, as soon as I am free, I am going back to mark the place where they shot her. She was one of America's bravest soldiers." His voice broke utterly and he turned away.

Chapter Thirty

TWO DAYS LATER THE "ADZE" WAS lying in the *rade* off the city of Brest, France. The great transport was sending a brown line of khaki onto the soil of France.

Dorn was pacing the narrow deck in a moody sense of defeat that he could not shake off. He had won gloriously yet he felt only loss. He realized how much he had been fighting for Betty and how little for himself. He had done his best to investigate her death by wireless and to have Washington gather details. But he was forced to realize that to them she was just one atom, one little pawn in the game of war, while to him she had been the entire battle. He determined the moment his hands were untied he would ferret out the tragedy to its last detail.

Just beyond them was the fort, with its depressing evidence that carnage and lust was being resisted to the last notch of their strength.

On the other side of the "Adze" was lashed a

tank boat pumping fuel oil with nervous haste through a hose until every gallon of the "Adze's" capacity was filled.

When that was done their orders to search for the submarine base would take them to the south coast of France and Spain, then to the Canary Islands and Madeira. Dorn was restless under this enforced search. He was eager to get back to the Azores. Although he realized the futility of his longing, he had an almost morbid desire to visit the spot where Betty had been buried.

A launch came alongside the tank boat. This fact did not interest Dorn until in glancing casually to her decks he saw a broad, familiar back. The newcomer wheeled suddenly and looked squarely into Dorn's face. Then he darted forward and came on board the "Adze."

"Lieutenant Pettingill!" Dorn cried out eagerly.

"A Lieutenant, yourself, Dorn, as I live!" exclaimed Pettingill. "I cannot tell you how delighted I am to see you, and how anxious I am to know all that has happened since I left you looking so forlorn at Hampton Roads. It was a wrench for me to leave you then, my friend."

"I had no idea you were here," said Dorn.

"And I also had no idea you were within three thousand miles, yet I have been thinking of you almost constantly ever since I received an order yesterday to come to the 'Adze' for vital information concerning fifty tons of S. H. I am then to go to the Azores to work the cargo submarine, with its prize contents, back to an American port."

"I wonder if you know," Dorn informed him soberly, "that those are the same fifty tons of S. H. we thought we were sleeping with. Of course you've had no chance to get details. Come inside, out of the sun, and I'll tell you about it."

It took Dorn more than an hour to relate all that had happened to his old friend. When he came to his account of Betty's death his voice shook, and it was only with supreme effort that he could go on. Pettingill understood more than he was told, for he had realized in the mountains the closeness of Dorn's comradeship with the girl. His hand was on Dorn's shoulder and his eyes were moist.

"She was a brave girl," he said in a low tone, "and we must remember that she accomplished a brave work." Then he shifted to less harrowing

details. "But you have not made it plain what became of Whaley. Is that dog still on board the submarine for me to deal with? I almost hope he is, I'd enjoy it."

"No. A more careful examination of Miss Fraser's diary brought to light the information that Malvoney, realizing his worthlessness, filled a life preserver with lead, then tripped him overboard in cold blood."

"Whaley got a good example of Hunnish gratitude," said Pettingill.

"I've examined every bit of evidence found in that baggage and cannot trace a single clue as to how they accomplished the theft. Malvoney's baggage has not yet been found. Doubtless he tossed it overboard. When I provide that one missing link I am through." Dorn sighed wearily. "After that it doesn't seem as if it mattered much what became of me."

"I understand, Dorn," said Pettingill, "even I cannot yet recover from the shock of this occurrence and I am sure it will be a long time before your steadfast soul can forget. What you need now is work and more work."

"Yes, but somehow it seems as if I needed more than that to go back and trace the details

of her death. The call is stronger than I can bear, yet it seems so futile to go. I am not yet allowed to return. We sail in a few minutes for the Gulf of Mexico. There is one thing I wish — " He stopped and his hands gripped tight.

"Dorn, you know that I said I sail in a few hours for the Azores. If there is anything possible for me to do, will you let me?"

"Yet, this thing is so unusual, and will involve so much time and red tape, that I hesitate to ask even you," faltered Dorn.

"Try me; the harder it is, the more relief it will bring us both. If it is possible it shall be done."

Still Dorn hesitated. "Do you know she is buried out there as a felon," he shuddered, "buried with those two snakes? When I think of her beautiful body thus — oh God, Pettingill, perhaps it doesn't matter, perhaps her soul doesn't care, yet the thought is more than I can stand. I want her body sent home, taken back to the mountains to the folks she loved and died for."

"I don't believe that will be difficult to manage," comforted Pettingill. "And it may require a time to get rid of the crew on that sub, fumigate and make her safe for my men. But

when the facts are known, there will be no red tape, Dorn. The Government will be as eager as we are to make any possible amends. She is one of our heroes, surely."

"Then you will see that it is done?"

"Yes, Dorn. But now my time is up and I must get back to my ship. I have been forgetting one of my important errands with you. You have here the engine parts taken from the 'Merb'?"

"Yes, but better send a man for them, they are heavy."

With real regret Dorn saw his friend board the launch and hasten toward his ship. His visit had been a tonic.

In another hour the pump that sent a three-inch stream of life into the tanks of the "Adze" stopped. They threw off the lines that bound them together. The "Adze" began to draw in her chain, and the moment the anchor came to the water's edge she swung in the stream, headed for the sea. She swept forward like a frightened thing, something like a monster bee that had found its fill of precious honey on one flower, and with mighty power sped on its way to its appointed purpose.

The rapid trip to the Canary Islands held no special interest to Dorn. Again on the way to Madeira in calm seas nothing developed to interest him. They sped away on a new course, due east to the Bermudas, into the Gulf of Mexico.

Lieutenant Worth spent more time in Dorn's room than he did in his own quarters, as Dorn had to remain with his instruments for twenty-four hours for no assistant had been available. But as they now were entirely out of the danger zone he was able to pull himself together and make up his lost sleep.

He and Worth studied the papers found in the German captain's bag and came to the conclusion that the base of operation and supplies was not in Mexican waters at all. They placed it somewhat uncertainly off the west coast of Florida, likely on some of the barren islands there.

The two thousand miles from Madeira to Dry Tortugas, Florida, were covered in less than three days. Like a great hound of the sea the "Adze" made careful search. Their attention was particularly centered on one of the larger islands that offered a fair protection to ships against the winds. They decided to anchor here and

watch a while. Dorn was able to pick up Washington to give report and get new orders.

"Remain and watch twenty-four hours more," came the reply, "then report to an Atlantic port."

"Dorn," declared Lieutenant Worth, "I believe we're on the right track. While you were at the instruments, some fellow was steaming directly behind us. As soon as he got within sight, he turned quickly and changed his course."

"You believe then that the 'Merb' was loaded here?"

"More than that, I believe we are on the trail of the second sub. Do you see those gulls over there? Notice how they hover over one spot? They don't do that unless they expect something to eat. As far as we know there are only two boats in this cargo submarine enterprise. They probably are making more, but only two have been released. We have one of them safe enough."

"And if we can get the other," broke in Dorn, "our job will be through and I can —"

He did not finish, but Worth understood.

"The chart indicates," continued Worth, "about twelve fathoms of water there and a gull can see that far, also they know without seeing."

"I'd like mighty well to see them get a good square meal," said Dorn grimly.

They lifted their glasses to study the scene.

"It would cost but one shot to demonstrate your theory," suggested Dorn.

"One might not be enough, but two, about fifty feet apart, would at least bring up a lot of fish for those gulls. Let's try it, anyhow."

Without waiting for approval Worth summoned his officer and directed that the shots be fired.

The "Adze" appeared to grab her anchor chain in her mouth and bolt for the spot, working up a speed of twenty knots in the thousand feet. At the signal a giant capsule slid down and hardly disappeared before another depth bomb slid after it. All the while the "Adze" was gaining speed to get away.

The results were more surprising than usual. Though the "Adze" was five hundred feet distant when the first bomb charged with S. H. was exploded, fifty or sixty feet under the water, the men on deck were thrown violently down, and had hardly risen before the second bomb brought them down again. The sea boiled as a mighty caldron.

"And now let's see if we have wasted our

ammunition," said Worth, as the "Adze" swung about and dropped her anchor close to the spot where they had discharged the bombs.

"By Heaven, what's that?" shouted Worth, as the sea gave a violent wrench and belched great volumes of air. "That was not from our shot."

"Great God, man, we've hit something," cried Dorn excitedly, grabbing the Lieutenant's arm. "Where did that bale of cotton come from?"

"Is that a bale of cotton?"

"As sure as you live, it's a compressed bale. The Germans want cotton badly. Look, there comes another, and another. As sure as Heaven those bombs have opened up a sub. Another shot will bring more."

"Ho! the lead there," Lieutenant Worth ordered his officer of the deck.

"Twelve fathoms," came the call.

"Send down another two bombs set to explode as deep as possible." He turned back to Dorn. "Now we'll surely bring up something."

The "Adze" once more took up her anchor chain and moved backward some five hundred feet like a giant making ready for a high jump. As though in anger she rushed toward the spot where there was still some agitation of the water.

Like a huge wasp she let loose her terrorizing stinger. This time every man stayed below deck to avoid being thrown down. The water rose in the air higher than before and the sea boiled up, indicating the stupendous effect of the S. H.

The "Adze" wheeled again like a giant eagle and anchored near the place where the bale of cotton rose. Two or three bodies now came to the surface together with other wreckage lighter than water.

"Your instinct was good," said Dorn gravely. "There was a submarine there."

Worth adjusted his glasses and began to count. "There are twelve bodies floating out there now," he said; "the Hun evidently was short-handed, and that fellow we saw turning back was bringing a larger crew."

"Lieutenant Worth," exlaimed Dorn, "do you realize what the destruction of this submarine means?"

"For one thing it means that we are twice-famous men. It also means that this explosive S. H. is more terrible even than we thought. And further, Dorn, it means we are going home."

"Not just yet," shivered Dorn. "We've got to search all those twelve bodies and examine every bit of evidence that we can take back for the department at Washington."

And the gruesome task had to be done. To Dorn's tautly strung nerves it seemed the last straw, but a few hours later they were through and in two days more the "Adze" like a queen of the water came swinging into the calm waters of a northwest harbor.

With the same restless impatience Dorn asked for orders from Washington. His eyes were turned toward the Azores, yet instinctively he knew what his unsurmountable instructions would be. They came as he expected:

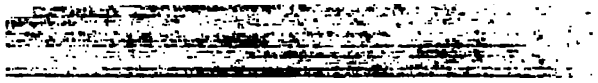
"Worth will head convoy for the troop ship leaving harbor tomorrow. After this trip he will return to Washington.

"Dorn will proceed to Washington with all accumulated evidence concerning submarines. Prize 'Merb' is in harbor at Navy Yard, being surveyed by proper officers."

He went at once to Lieutenant Worth with the message. "Here are your orders," he smiled. "One more trip on the 'Adze,' then you are to come to Washington."



"He stood still, gripping the door casing."



"And where do you go, old man? I was afraid they wouldn't let you stay with me through another trip."

"I am to take the evidence to Washington. But, God knows I don't want any swivel chairs and flunkies about me. I want action. There is not a place in the whole government that I want. I must have work, hard, hard work."

"I know how you feel, Dorn. Such a wound as yours will not heal quickly, even in activity. But wherever you go, whatever you do, I want you to know my heart is with you. And we mustn't forget either, the new possibilities opening to us. This prize will be a big one. It means a lot of money for us both, Dorn."

"I wish to God I wanted it," said Dorn bitterly. "A month ago it would have filled me with elation." Then he shook himself together. "The operator at Washington informs me that our prize, the 'Merb,' is at the Navy Yard here, being surveyed for value. I want to see Pettingill, and am going to look him up."

"I do not need to leave till tomorrow," said Worth, "so I'll come with you."

And together they went to taste the first material laurels of their victory.

Chapter Thirty-one

IT WAS WITH MIXED EMOTIONS THAT Dorn first viewed the "Merb" from a distance, as they stood on the wharf in the Navy Yard. It held a new meaning for him now, full of both tenderness and horror, for it was there that Betty had fought, and won her fight, for his honor and her own. Before, it had been to him merely an enemy craft, now it seemed like a sinister tombstone erected over dead hopes.

An improvised gang plank led to its deck from the wharf. Pettingill heard their approach and came swiftly forward with hand outstretched.

"I thought you'd come," he greeted, as the friends gripped hands. "I hear that you and Lieutenant Worth have been accumulating fresh laurels. It seems to me you have more than one man's share to your credit now."

Pettingill preceded them along the gang plank, and led the way to the deck of the "Merb." "I understand you have viewed this monster only

from a distance," he said, "and you'll be glad to view your spoils at closer range. The quarantine officers have passed her as safe." They followed him into the tower, looking from side to side with appraising eyes.

In the center of the tower a table had been placed for consultation purposes and steel stools arranged about it.

"This is the only available space on board," said Pettingill, "the rest we can congratulate ourselves is full of cargo to the last cubic foot."

"Did you have trouble navigating her?" asked Worth.

"Not a bit. As you know she is an oil burner with plenty of fuel to bring her here. The machinery was in good condition, except that she would not submerge, but after the first day from the Azores I was in friendly waters and did not worry."

Dorn had a sense of fighting for time, of putting off the question that was clamoring in his heart. He wanted to ask if Pettingill had fulfilled his mission in regard to Betty. If so, then it might be that within a few feet of him — His thoughts could not make tangible this possibility. He shivered and grew white. Pettingill sensed

the cause of his agitation and cut their commonplace talk short.

"Dorn," he said gravely, "I want you to take a good grip on your courage, pull yourself together hard, and go into the second mate's room, that door there," pointing.

Dorn's hands clenched and the muscles of his face worked convulsively. He stood with his back to the men, trying to force himself to go.

"My God, I can't!" he cried.

"There's good news, too, Dorn," Pettingill prepared him gently. "Go on, old man, we'll wait for you here."

Worth, seeming to sense the full meaning of Pettingill's words, had risen to his feet, as if he would spring forward into the room beyond, but Pettingill checked him.

"Go, Dorn!" insisted his friend.

Something in the tone brought the quick blood throbbing to Dorn's temples and the color rushed back into his cheeks.

Instinctively he, too, knew. "You don't mean, you can't mean — " He rushed forward and opened the door. Then he checked himself for the wild hope that Pettingill's manner had brought. It was cruel of his friend, even sub-

consciously to rouse this sense of something big and wonderful and happy waiting for him there. Couldn't Pettingill understand what it would mean for the man who loved her to find her mutilated body —

He entered the room slowly with bent head. He heard a gentle stirring and a low choked cry. From the cot in the corner a pale face was raised, framed in a rumpled mass of short brown curls.

He stood still, his hand gripping the door casing. His eyes were wide in the shock of unbelief. But her brown eyes were raised wistfully to his, and he knew that his senses had not deceived him. Then he rushed forward, the barriers of his fear broken down.

"Oh, Betty, it can't be, and yet it is, it is you, your wonderful self, warm and alive — "

"And very, very tired," she breathed. Her hands went out and he held them close against the fierce pounding of his heart.

"You thought — " she faltered.

"I thought everything that was terrible! Oh, my dear, my dear. I have lived in a thousand hells. You were not with them then, those three who tried to escape? And Pettingill found you,

and brought you back? You have been on board this pest ship all the time?"

"I've been pretty sick, Jack," she smiled gently. "But I'm going to get better now. Lieutenant Pettingill told me you all thought me dead and I begged him not to let you know until we could be sure I wasn't going to die, after all. They weren't sure of that until today. And then I was coming to you. I haven't been able to get up yet, but every one has been very kind. It was one of the sailors who went with Malvoney and the captain."

"Was it the fever, Betty?"

"No. I just broke down, gave out, fell to pieces. It was an awful time, Jack."

And looking at her face he was able to read just how terrible it must have been. To him she was still the one woman, but there were new lines on her white face, and a startled fear still lurking in her brown eyes.

"We're going to take all the pain and the terrible memories away, Betty," he choked. "That is going to be the work of all my life, to help you forget everything unhappy."

"And you have suffered too, Jack, I can see it in your face, feel it in your voice. It has been

hard for me to lie here knowing that you were suffering even more because of me. Yet it would have been worse to hear that I was safe, merely to learn afterward that I must die, after all. Wouldn't that have been worse, Jack? Should I have let him send the message as soon as he found me, even if I wasn't sure?"

"No, Betty. I think to have lost you twice, would have killed me. But now, can you tell me about it, are you strong enough to talk much? When can you leave this boat, and come with me?"

"They think I am better here, just quiet, for a few days. It is all clean and safe now, but I shall get strong very soon, then the mountains will do the rest."

"The mountains and — me — Betty, don't forget me."

"I haven't been forgetting you one minute all this time, Jack. I couldn't have done anything if I hadn't felt you near me, with your own strength and endurance. Time and time again I have been on the point of giving up, then the thought of all you had done, sent me back to duty."

"All I have done!" he repeated; "why, I have

done nothing, not a thing, compared to your own brave sacrifices. Oh, Betty, it's going to be a glorious victory for us when you come back. Can't you see Malcom's face now, and the shining eyes of all your people? We'll be very happy, won't we, Betty?"

But the men outside had allowed them all the time they could, and there now was an insistent, joyous pounding on the door. Dorn leaped to open it, and stood before them unashamed of the tears that were streaming down his lined face.

"I broke it as gently as I could, Dorn," said Pettingill. "She wouldn't let me send for you sooner. Was I cruel, old man?"

"Nothing matters now," said Dorn in a thick unsteady voice. "A fellow never knows the full meaning of things till he faces them. I know what life means to me now — life and heaven."

"But let's get down to earth for the present," beamed Worth. "I'd like to be introduced, then I'd like to hear all the news."

In contrition Dorn presented him to Betty, then the three men sat near her cot, and listened to her brave little story.

"And it was you," marveled Dorn, "who put the valve out of commission, so she couldn't

submerge, and who made the breech lock of the gun useless."

"Yes," answered Betty, brightening at the remembrance. "I used the powerful acid they gave me at Washington to destroy the code. But I was able to do even more than that, for I purposely mixed the suitcases, and let Malvoney run off with mine, while I held his for the evidence that I knew it would contain."

"By Jove, Miss Fraser," exclaimed Worth, "there wasn't much you didn't think of, was there?"

"And was the evidence we wanted there?" asked Dorn breathlessly.

"Every bit of it. It is so simple that we will laugh at ourselves for not figuring it out before. I found engravings and photographs and notes, showing exactly how it was done." From under her pillow she took a roll of papers, and spread them before the astonished men. "This," she explained, "is the diagram Malvoney gave Whaley to work from. You will remember the poor fellow had the aspiration to be an artist. Malvoney gave him paint and brushes, but they were put to sorry use. See, this photograph shows two new cars on the siding where the car of S. H.

was loaded. Both of them are B. R. & B. One was numbered 76533 and in the same series the other was numbered 76538. It took only a few moments for Whaley to change that three to an eight, on the loaded car, and the eight to a three on the empty. He stole the seals and sealed the empty, so that when the Marines were given the number they guarded the empty. And of course when the conductor of the freight went in on the switch, he took the car by its number, believing it his valuable freight. A few days later the loaded car went to Pittsburg as an empty. That's how you happened to stumble upon it. Also the similarity in those numbers was what gave you your 'hunch' that day, remember, Jack?"

"Yes, I remember, and I can hardly grasp my own stupidity at not seeing more than a mere 'hunch' in that very obvious solution. But how did they get the car the second time?"

"All they had to do was to let the brakes off, where gravity would carry it to the Junction. It was Malvoney who changed the number that time, for Whaley had to make the pretense of mustering the guard. The car was then, with its new number, rushed into Pittsburg, reloaded

into express cars, and sent through to Charleston, on passenger time."

"But," exclaimed Dorn, "that couldn't have been done without help from the inside."

"Well," reminded Pettingill bitterly, "remember Malvoney had a fat roll and he used it freely. I am afraid that even in the best institutions and enterprises there are still men who can be bought."

"The railroad service has got to be purged," said Dorn hotly.

"They already have commenced on that," assured Pettingill. "And now we all are cleared gloriously, thanks to the little lady here."

"And that little lady is growing very tired now," said Dorn tenderly, "and we must let her rest."

Worth and Pettingill rose at once and bent over her hand. There was real homage in their parting words.

Left alone with Dorn, Betty for the first time seemed confused. The tangles were all cleared, and there was nothing left for them to talk about now but themselves.

"I'm not going to bother you now, dear," he promised, "but you remember, way, way back there was something we were going to talk about

when we both had won, when our work was done. We have won, Betty, and our task is finished. And do you know, we can do much for our mountains now, because we shall be very rich."

"Rich in so many ways, Jack," she whispered, and her voice told him all her happiness.

THE END

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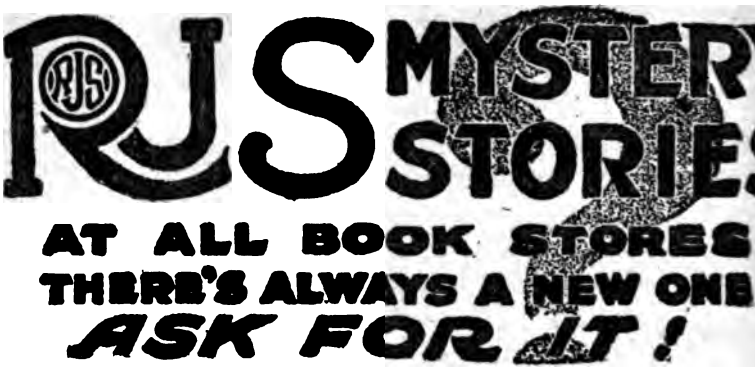
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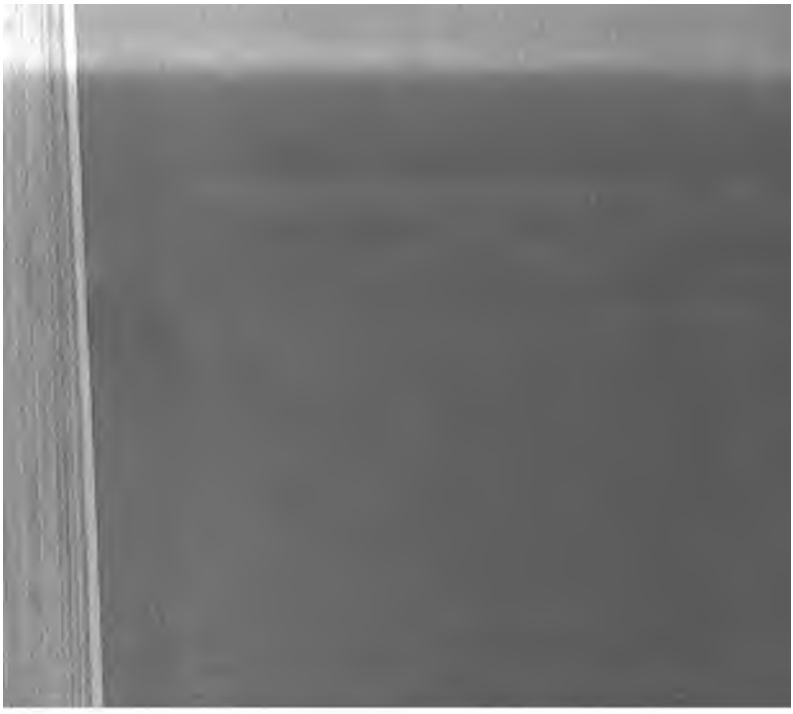
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